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November 10, 1897.

No. 994.

PUBLISHED EVERY
WEDNESDAY.

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92 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

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Vol. LXXVII.

Buffalo Bill's Lone Hand;

Or, THE UNKNOWN DEAD-SHOT. • By COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.



BUFFALO BILL GAZED UPON THE MOUNTAIN RECLUSE WITH DEEPEST INTEREST.



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BUFFALO BILL GAZED UPON THE MOUNTAIN RECLUSE WITH DEEPEST INTEREST.

Buffalo Bill's Lone Hand;

OR,

The Unknown Dead-Shot.

A Story of the Diamond Ten of Gold Dust Valley.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

LONE HAND SAM.

"PARDS, I have made my fortune. I am a rich man and leave you to-morrow, for those I love and who love me are awaiting me."

"Come one, come all, for I set up the drinks to-night."

"If there is one here whom I have wronged, I beg his pardon now, and ask him to forgive and forget."

"If there is one here who holds ill-will against me, I ask him to take my hand in friendship."

"Come, Jerry, set up your best tanglefoot and cigars, and I'll foot the bill."

The speaker was a man of striking appearance, tall, well formed, clad in the garb of a border miner, armed with revolvers and bowie, and with a bearded face and long hair in which the silver threads were visible.

Darkly bronzed, bold and determined was his face, and in it was intelligence, the stamp of refinement and marked determination.

In the gold mines of Colorado he was known as Lone Hand Sam, from the fact that he dwelt alone in his little cabin in the mountains, came to the mining-camps only for his provisions and mail and had no intimates, though his hand was ever open to those in distress; he had been known to sit up all night with a wounded man, or one who was sick, but those who had sought trouble with him had found him a deadly foe when driven to bay, and yet he had never been known to seek or make trouble.

It was believed in the mines that he had struck it rich, so his announcement that he "had made his fortune" surprised no one.

Nearly two hundred men stepped forward to accept his general invitation, several of them being miners who had had a difficulty with him in the past, they having originated the trouble, but now being willing to forget all differences.

"Jerry" set up the glasses and bottles, ranged several boxes of cigars along the bar, and the health and good luck of Lone Hand Sam was drank again and again.

It was supposed that the lucky miner would take the stage coach that passed through the camp that night bound eastward, but several, who were up when it rolled through Gold Dust Valley, stated the next morning that Lone Hand Sam had not gone as supposed.

From this it was thought that he had gotten his gold out of the camps before he was ready to start and had left on horseback.

But, when the miners assembled the next night at Jerry's saloon, it was reported that Lone Hand Sam had left the mine by wagon, it having come out that he had bought a "prairie schooner" from several miners who had come that way to Gold Dust Valley.

"I seen ther wagon follerin' on arter ther coach afore day this mornin'," said a miner, who lived a couple of miles out on the Overland Trail.

"Then he's a bigger fool then I thought him, ter go thet way and take his gold with him."

"He'll be held up afore he gits fifty miles," remarked another.

This seemed to be the general opinion, and at the words strange glances were cast between half a dozen of those present, and Lone Hand Sam became the general subject of conversation.

It at last came out that the wagon was a stout one, was drawn by four good horses, Lone Hand Sam's cabin had been pretty well stripped of its contents, and he was known to have purchased at the store in Gold Dust Valley a large supply of provisions, ammunitions, and several pairs of stout leather saddle-bags, evidently for his gold, and to carry on the horses, should the wagon break down.

It was a long and hard trail along the

Overland, and the question was, could he keep up with the coach with its relays of fresh horses?

Had he gone alone?

He was well able to take care of himself under ordinary circumstances, but outlaws, knowing that he carried a fortune in gold, would make a desperate fight for it, was the opinion of all.

He had successfully played a "lone hand" during the five years he had been in the mining country, but would he be able to still keep it up?

The miners seemed to feel grieved that he had not taken them into his confidence. They thought he should have told them that he was going to carry his gold through alone.

In fact, they talked it over until many began to feel as though he had deceived them, and a few hinted that he ought to be brought back and made to take the chances they did in sending his gold through by coach!

But, the majority would not of course listen to this, and the decision was that he had played a lone hand as usual, and played it boldly, and if he got through all right it would be just his luck.

There were several who thought that Lone Hand Sam and his treasure should have a secret guard, and they were the men among whom strange glances had passed when his bold act had become known.

One by one these "citizens" slipped out of Jerry's saloon to meet later at a cabin in the mountains.

CHAPTER II.

THE PLOTTERS.

"PARDS, he's foiled us."

"Sure; give us ther slip."

"Got away with ther boodle."

"And it's a long trail to follow him."

"But we kin do it, for he has wheels, and we'll go in ther saddle."

"If ther chief says so."

"Where is ther chief?"

"He were at Jerry's."

"Yes, suppose we send for him, for he give us ther look ter come out."

Half a dozen men were present. They had come one at a time to a little cabin some distance from the mining-camps known as Gold Dust.

They were the same fellows who had cast mysterious looks at each other when the story was told of how Lone Hand Sam had gone alone by wagon, carrying his gold.

The cabin was the rendezvous of a band of men known as the Ten of Diamonds, from the fact that they seemed to be successful miners, always had money, and each one wore a diamond pin in his woolen shirt.

They were not a bad lot, as the word went, were generous to their comrades, none drank to excess, avoided trouble, although each and every one of them had made his mark when he was forced to act.

In fact, the only mystery about them was that they were all successful gamblers, and kept secret where their assumed mines were and how much these mines panned out in gold, daily.

That they were more than camp comrades no one believed, or that they were banded together for good or evil was not even suspected.

But, their leaving Jerry's saloon as they had, and meeting in the little cabin, with the conversation that opens this chapter, would indicate that they were strangely interested in Lone Hand Sam and his gold.

One of their number at once returned to the camps for the one spoken of as chief, while the others sat in the cabin talking over Lone Hand Sam's departure, as though in going he had actually wronged them, and which wrong they proposed to right.

Thus half an hour passed and the messenger returned.

He was accompanied by one more of the Diamond Ten, while two others soon after dropped in.

"But, where is the chief?" came the question.

The messenger could only report that he was not in the saloon when he went back, the others stating that he had gone out when the first of the party had done so.

"Of course, pards, he will order us on the trail of Lone Hand Sam, or at least part of the band, for it will not do to have more

than five absent at once; it would attract attention."

"He cannot go, as he has to start at daylight he had break, he told us, for the upper mines, and had carried we will draw lots to see which one of us will take the trail, so we can get our horses and coach in all ready."

The speaker, known as Dick Drew, was the next in command to the so-called chief, and striking a light he got out a small bag in which were a number of bullets, all of the same size, but half being painted red.

Dropping nine back into the bag, five red and four unpainted, he ordered:

"Draw, pards, and as it won't do for thirty miles chief and me to both be away at the same time, I'll not be in it."

The men drew and the five who got the red bullets were the ones chosen to follow Lone Hand Sam.

"Buck Bradley, you will be leader, so ambushed now go all of you and get your horses and return here for orders from the chief, for suspicious will, meanwhile, go back to the camps and look him up."

In an hour's time the five selected men had returned and were awaiting for the coming of the chief and the lieutenant.

The latter soon appeared, but alone.

"I cannot find the chief, but was told he had started for the upper mines, as you know he said he was going, so that settles it."

"Then we can't go, Pard Dick?"

"On the contrary you can go, for I will take the responsibility of sending you, for the case is urgent."

"Good!" came in a chorus of voices, and the one who had been appointed to lead asked:

"Now, Pard Dick, what is to be done?"

"Strike Lone Hand Sam's trail and when you have found him, get his gold, that is all, for it must all come out of our own diggings you know."

"That means kill him?"

"Yes, and for fear he might possibly make his escape, mask yourselves so he will know none of you."

"Should he get back to Gold Dust it will mean a hemp picnic for every man of you, if he sees your faces."

"And the dust?"

"Cache it in a safe place until we can bring it in, little by little, as from our own output; hide his wagon for future use and turn his horses loose, so they will follow the trail eastward."

"We understand, and you'll square our going with the chief, without his direct orders?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then we'll be off mighty quick," announced Buck Bradley and they went out to mount their horses when Dick Drew called after them:

"Come back one at a time and by different trails, and cover up your tracks so all will think Lone Hand Sam went through all right."

"I understand."

"He was a popular man in Gold Dust Valley you know, and if they get wind of it that he was overtaken by men from the camps and killed, there are those who would make a thorough search for the fellows who did it."

"You bet they would; but, we knows our business and our danger, Pard Dick, and we'll come back in a few days with a big pocket to add to our mines' yield—ha, ha!"

Buck Bradley rode away in the darkness, followed by the four who were to be his comrades upon the trail. The camp wolves were after Lone Hand Sam!

CHAPTER III.

THE MINER'S DOOM.

LONE HAND SAM had taken his chances to get his gold, and he had planned well to escape with it from the mines.

He had entered the mining country five years before as a tenderfoot, and bearing the stamp of "gentleman" upon him.

Who he was no one knew, and save that he had been given the nickname of Lone Hand Sam because of his having no pard or comrade he was utterly unknown to all of his comrades.

He had kept his own counsel, and not a soul was aware of how well fortune had

loved him, or what amount of the precious metal he had secured after his years of toil, and had carried with him from the mines. Telling no one how he was going, he had quietly laid his plans, and followed on after the coach in a well-laden wagon, drawn by four good horses, starting after night had set in.

Even the driver of the Overland stage did not know that the lone miner was following.

His horses were fresh, he handled the reins with skill, and he kept the team at a good pace until the sun rose, and then he halted, all of a sudden, thirty miles away from Gold Dust Valley.

He sought a pleasant camping-place off the trail, found good grass and water for his horses, and having staked them out set about looking to his own comfort.

"I will have a good breakfast, and then lie in wait for an ambush on the trail to see just who might make a notion to follow me, for I confess I am suspicious of many back in Gold Dust Valley who would gladly kill me to get a fortune—such as they would suppose.

"But, I have struggled too long and hard—have suffered too much—have built up too many castles of future happiness to risk losing my riches, now that they are all my own. No, my fortune is safe, if I can only keep them from killing me, for I have been haunted by a strange presentiment of evil ever since I met that man in the mines, whom I believed dead.

"The grave does not give up its dead, I well know; but that man has haunted me as though he were the very ghost of—bah! I must not fear now, when the past is behind me, the future before me with every hope of happiness.

"Now to breakfast."

Passing his hand across his forehead, as though to brush away bygone shadows, Lone Hand Sam set to work gathering wood for a fire, and soon had one blazing and his breakfast cooking.

But memories would crowd upon him, and several times he murmured:

"I am glad that I wrote those letters, for, if aught should happen to me my gold would be safe; they would get it and not the human wolves who covet my wealth and may attempt to secure it."

He ate his breakfast with the appetite of one in perfect health, and having decided to camp for the day and travel by night, he was shouldering his rifle to lie in ambush upon the trail, when he muttered in a drowsy tone:

"I am half asleep—I will take a nap first."

He crawled into the wagon with an effort, for he seemed overcome with sleep, and, as he stretched himself out upon his blankets, he said, quickly:

"My God! what is the matter with me? This is not a stupor from want of sleep! Have I been—"

But he spoke no more. He fell back upon his coach, only to struggle up again, and with a mighty effort it seemed, tried to get out of the wagon.

In vain! The strong man fell back once more and his limbs refused to obey the impulse of his mind.

"Great God! Now I know! I have been poisoned!

"Some foe has done this—has poisoned my food; but—ha! ha! ha! They may have killed me, but I have foiled them;—my gold is safe! The wolves will not get that!"

He fell back upon his blankets as though unable to utter more.

There he lay, powerless to move, breathing heavily and his eyes wide open.

His teeth were set tightly together, and his face was the picture of despair, for his mind yet held sway and he seemed perfectly to realize just where he was, what the matter was, and that he was indeed doomed.

Then there flashed through his excited brain the thought that if he did die, he had foiled the foe who had taken his life, and an expression of mingled triumph and malignancy flashed over his countenance.

Again and again he made an effort to rise; his features were distorted in a pitiable degree as he realized his helplessness.

Shorter and shorter became his breathing; then his features grew rigid, save the eyes, which glared brightly until the last.

They revealed that the brain was the last to die, and showed the terrible anguish of

the man, past all hope now of remedy or relief.

At last the eyes slowly closed; the breathing became fainter and fainter, and then, with a gasp that shook the strong frame, the career of Lone Hand Sam had ended there—alone in those wilds; the gold he had worked so long and so faithfully to accumulate had cost him his life.

Whose was the cowardly hand which had perpetrated the atrocious act?

Who the undiscovered foe so base, so infamous as to slay him thus?

CHAPTER IV.

BUFFALO BILL ON A TRAIL.

It was nearing sunset of the day which had been fatal to the gold miner in his lone camp off the Overland Trail.

The horses staked out in a bit of meadowland had eaten the grass close within the circle of their lariats, and were growing nervous, for they wanted water and their master came not to them.

One of the animals, raising his head impatiently, neighed, and the sound went a long way off, reaching the ears of a horseman, then at a standstill on the traveled or coach trail.

The eyes of this horseman were upon the ground, scrutinizingly, but when the neighing of the horse reached his ears, he suddenly clutched his rifle with a firm grip and looked most searchingly around him.

Again came the neigh, more impatiently than before, and the horseman then effectively located the direction from whence the evident call came.

As he halted thus he presented a striking picture.

His mount was a splendid animal—long-bodied, gaunt as a hound, clean-limbed, small head and with arched neck.

He seemed not to mind the weight of his rider, large Texan saddle and trappings, for the horseman was equipped for a long ride.

And the horseman?

But, why describe one of the most picturesque figures known to-day in any land? for the rider was Buffalo Bill!

At the time of this story Buffalo Bill appears as a tall and rather slender man, dark-faced and long-haired. He was on a scout from an army post and was crossing the open or regular stage trail, at the point where Lone Hand Sam had turned out of it to go into the camp which had been fatal to him, when his eyes had fallen upon the track of the wagon-wheels, and while he paused he wondered why they had branched off, thinking of course that the tracks were made by the mail coach.

Just then came the impatient neighing of the horse and the wary scout instantly was all alert.

He knew that the stage from Gold Dust Valley was making weekly trips, that its time for leaving the mining-camps would have brought it along there at daybreak of that very day.

He saw tracks of wheels passing on along the trail, but what meant these other tracks which had branched off as though run from the trail? Had outlaws captured an extra?

He could not solve the mystery, and then when suddenly, the neighing of the horse startled him the mystery deepened.

He would investigate.

So he followed the wagon-tracks where they turned off from the main trail.

Again, at a short interval, came the neighing of the horse, and he knew that the intelligent brute was in trouble and was calling for aid.

A ride of several hundred yards brought the scout into a little valley, through which ran a stream, and where, under the shadow of a hill, he saw a white tilted wagon.

In the meadow land four fine horses were visible. Every one of them had their heads up, eagerly watching his approach.

But, no man was visible. There was the wagon, the harness placed on the ground where it had been stripped from the horses, the ashes where a fire had been, the four animals tethered near, but not a human in sight!

Buffalo Bill, mystified and suspicious, halted a hundred yards away, his rifle ready for use and his own horse sharing his excitement, for it was uneasy and wary.

The wagon was closely covered, its canvas covering drawn tightly in at each end, but with no owner near, the appearance of things savored of uncertainty.

"The owner must be away hunting for game," the scout finally decided, "but, who can he be, or they be, traveling thus out of the mining-camps by wagons, and not by stage?" mused the scout.

To make sure that no one was asleep in the wagon he called out:

"Hello, there?"

No response.

"Ho, pard! Wake up!"

Still no reply.

"If he is asleep then he sleeps like the dead," and Buffalo Bill rode nearer to the wagon.

With his coming the tethered horses had ceased their neighing and stood looking at him quietly, as though knowing now that they were all right.

As he drew near the wagon, Buffalo Bill again called, but without eliciting any response.

Dismounting he hitched his horse, and then, revolver in hand, leaped upon the wagon.

Peering within the cover he beheld the occupant.

A man's form lay at length upon a bed of blankets.

The pallor of the face caught the scout's eye, and leaning forward he placed his hand upon the foot nearest to him and lifted the limb.

It was rigid!

Then the scout got into the wagon, turned the face so that he had a good look at it, and cried:

"My God! it is the Gold Miner, Lone Hand Sam, who once saved my life; and he is dead!

"Dead, and here! What does it mean?

"Some one has killed him! He has been murdered!

"But why murdered? and why was he here, in this wagon alone?"

And Buffalo Bill's searching eye began to scan the contents of the wagon.

Almost at once he saw the heavy saddle-bags and lifting one found it apparently metal filled.

"No! no!" he muttered; "he has not been murdered nor robbed, for these bags are heavy with gold. If he had been killed he would have been robbed.

"This is mysterious—it is incomprehensible; but, my old friend, it shall not baffle me; I will sift the matter to the end; I will know what it all means, and if you have been wronged and done for by some enemy, woe unto him! Buffalo Bill is on his trail!"

CHAPTER V.

THE MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

BUFFALO BILL proceeded to investigate further. All the leather bags in the wagon he found were intact; not one had been plundered. Then he examined the body. Not a wound was found, so Lone Hand Sam had not been shot, and all his weapons—rifle and revolvers, were full charged, so he had not died in any fight for life.

After this thorough search the observant scout felt doubly certain that no one had killed the miner, nor been in possession of his wagon or treasure.

The body was cold and stiff, and the impatience of the horses showed that the man had been dead for hours.

The ashes in the fire were also cold, and there sat the coffee-pot, frying-pan, tin cup and plate just as all had been left, after a well prepared meal.

But the face of the miner! That revealed that he must have suffered in his last moments—suffered to an agonizing degree.

Why was this? the scout wondered. What would produce such agony?

In glancing at the cooking utensils, and the food near, the keen vision of the investigator fell upon a white substance in the tin cup!

It was not sugar, for the latter was brown and in a bag near at hand.

The scout carefully scrutinized the white particles. Why were they there?

Did Sam put them in his coffee?

Impossible to think that!

"Can it be that he has been poisoned?" he asked himself.

Since he showed no other cause of death, that was the only solution of the tragedy.

Then, if so—who did the deed?

Instantly the scout turned to the food near—some bacon, flour, sugar and coffee.

In a tin can the coffee was kept, already ground, and gazing closely at it Buffalo Bill discovered that mixed through it were the same white particles, a metallic powder, visible in the tin cup.

"This must be poison; but, surely, Sam cannot have taken his own life?"

"No, for why put the poison in the can of coffee if it was his intention merely to kill himself?"

"And why, with a fortune here in gold, should he wish to die?"

"No, Lone Hand Sam was no suicide, for, as I remember him, he was a quiet fellow, with a nerve of iron—one whom I felt sure had a history had met with some sorrow, some great misfortune, to drive him out here, for he was not a criminal, I am positive of that, and almost know that he was working like a slave for some urgent purpose."

"Against big odds he came to my aid that day when the Indians had me corralled, and but for his assistance I would have lost my scalp."

"He told me he was a gold-hunter, then prospecting for a find; and that he was a skilled surgeon I had reason to know, from the way he dressed my wounds."

"But that is all I know of him, except that, afterward, I saw him in Gold Dust Valley, and he told me he had struck it rich, and would soon be able to return home!"

"Now he is dead!"

"He has been poisoned, and by some devil incarnate who had access to his food, feared to face him alive, and plotted to follow on after and get his gold with no danger to himself; that, now, I see is the solution of this pitiful death, away out here in this almost trackless wilderness—away from all help—all friends!"

"Who is the murderer? Is he even now on the trail to follow up his victim and ascertain how successfully he has done his fiendish work?"

"That would not be strange. If Sam was poisoned for revenge even, the scoundrel who did the deed will be sure to put in an appearance."

"It is growing late. If the man is to come from Gold Dust Valley, as is likely, he should reach here by nightfall, and my game must be to surprise him, for the person who does follow on Sam's trail is sure to be the man I want. So I must get ready for his reception."

The scout proceeded to wrap the body in a blanket and place it on one side of the wagon; then he led the horses to water and staked them out in a fresh feeding ground, doing the same for his own animal.

Building a fire, he cooked his supper, but from his own provisions, not daring to touch the food he felt sure had proven fatal to the gold-hunter.

This done, he left the fire burning low and got into the wagon to watch and wait for what might happen.

The white cover of the wagon was in three pieces, stretched tightly over the frame, but Cody drew the canvas apart upon each side, just so he could look out and see any one approaching from either direction.

The moon had risen now, and cast a bright light upon the scene, though darkened occasionally by drifting clouds; but the scout did not tire in his vigil; something seemed to tell him success would reward his patience and vigilance.

He had been on watch several hours when his own sagacious horse gave the alarm of danger—a low whinny which implied that some one was approaching.

A moment after the sound of hoof-falls was heard and then ceased.

The fire flared up a little as Buffalo Bill had intended it should, and as the keen-visioned watcher peered through the opening in the canvas, he beheld a person scouting the camp and cautiously coming near.

The man was on foot, having dismounted, to enforce the greatest silence on his movements.

As he drew near he called out:

"Ho, pard! Can I get some grub and a

blanket with you, for Indians shot my horse, and nearly got my scalp."

No answer.

"Ho, pard, do you hear?"

Still no answer, and a third call followed.

Then came the triumphant words, clearly uttered and distinctly heard by the man on guard:

"The arsenic did its work!"

"The gold is mine! Oh, I'm in luck!"

With the words he stepped quickly toward the wagon, to start back with a cry of horror as a hand holding a revolver was turned out through the slit in the canvas, and covered him, while there came from Buffalo Bill:

"Hands up, or drop dead!"

CHAPTER VI.

BUFFALO BILL'S RUSE.

THE moon, drifting out from a bank of clouds, as Buffalo Bill uttered the words, its light fell full upon the midnight visitor to the lone camp.

He was tall, slender, clad in buckskin leggings and hunting shirt, with top boots and slouch hat.

His face was clean shaven, his hair dark and long, and he had the look of a powerful, desperate person, one who could maintain himself well in any danger or trouble.

At his back was slung his rifle; ready in his belt, right in front was a revolver, and other weapons were upon his hips the scout noted as he took all in at a glance, for the moonlight revealed all distinctly.

But, to the surprise of Buffalo Bill, the midnight visitor made no show of resistance, nor did he raise his hands as ordered.

Instead he said:

"Come, Lone Hand Sam, don't order my hands up, for I am here to be your friend."

"A strange way to prove it," muttered the scout.

"I will prove it, for I came to tell you that there are men on your trail from Gold Dust Valley, and I can help you save your treasure, and will."

"Come! There is not much time to lose."

"Wait until I dress myself and get out of the wagon."

"All right; hurry up, Sam."

Buffalo Bill drew his hand in through the opening, but of course kept his eye upon the stranger.

He saw that the moment he had drawn his hand into the wagon the fellow pulled his revolver from his belt.

Buffalo Bill then knew that he had a tricky and ready foe to deal with.

He could have fired on him, of course, then and there, but it was not his nature to take a man at a disadvantage. He would give him a chance for his life, and not shoot him down from ambush; he never fought that way.

So while pretending to dress he watched the man step to the end of the wagon, revolver in hand, to shoot him down the moment he appeared, for that the latter took him for Lone Hand Sam there was no doubt.

After a moment of reflection the scout decided upon a plan of action.

He unwrapped the blanket from about the form of the dead gold-miner and holding the body in his strong arms pressed toward the end of the wagon.

There stood the midnight visitor awaiting him, his revolver ready, and his face gleaming with malignant triumph.

Suddenly out of the wagon, with a few grumbling words, there appeared a head with a sombrero upon it.

Sam seemed to be taking in the situation, for the face was turned up toward the moonlight.

Following the head appeared the broad shoulders, as though the occupant of the wagon was coming out.

Hardly had the head and shoulders appeared when, quick as a flash, there rung out one, two shots, fired within half a dozen feet of the end of the wagon.

A deep groan followed; the form sunk down upon the wagon body, then fell over on the foot-board, to the next moment roll over upon the pole and drop heavily upon the ground.

There lay the form in a heap in the shadow of the wagon, which was between it and the moonlight.

As though not satisfied fully with his dead-

ly work, or to make assurance doubly sure, the man stepped forward, and leveling his revolver, deliberately fired one, two, three shots down into the form as it lay half under the wagon.

"That settles you, Lone Hand Sam, ever and ever, and makes me heir to the fortune you have here, and which by the time of conquest I am heir to."

"Now to get it safely out of this land, for there are others who are after it also. I must not lose it now. It is all mine!"

"Hands up! I've got you covered!" came the startling command, and a hand grasping a revolver was thrust out of the wagon, the muzzle almost touching the face of the man who stood the very picture of horror, the moonlight falling full upon his livid face.

CHAPTER VII.

A CHANCE FOR HIS LIFE.

To say that the midnight visitor to the camp of the dead gold miner was startled by the demand from within the wagon to raise his hands, when he believed that he had killed the occupant, would be to express but a fraction of the truth.

He was terrified, horrified, and stood helpless as a child.

He had emptied the revolver he held in his hand into the body of the already dead Lone Hand Sam, yet when he believed that Sam was alone the occupant of the wagon from within came the words that proved only to the contrary, but caused his life to hang by a thread.

Still covering the man, Buffalo Bill now sprung lightly from the wagon, the fellow gazing upon him with the same look of horror upon his face, while from his lips came the low-uttered words:

"Buffalo Bill, the army scout!"

"Yes, and wholly at your service! Let me see: I think I know you now as a gambler Gold Dust Valley, and known there as 'Ellis,' and the scout gazed fixedly into the villain's face.

"No, you are mistaken; I am not 'Ellis,' the gambler, as you call him."

"I may be mistaken, but think not. Anyhow, you dogged this gold-miner, Lone Hand Sam, whom I do know and was under obligations to—dogged him to kill and rob him, and when I carry you a prisoner to the Valley camps they will quickly hang you."

"See here, Buffalo Bill, I have heard much of you, and several times have met you, and know of your noble deeds."

"It is said of you that you never took advantage of a man in your life without a fair warning—that you would not even shoot an Indian from ambush, and I have had it proven to me to-night that you would not shoot me down, so I believe all I have heard of you and throw myself on your mercy."

"I can be merciless when I know I have cause to be."

"Well, I'll admit that I tracked Lone Hand Sam here, purposely to kill him, for the gold he had was my find; it came from my mine and he cheated me out of it, while, in the past, he has cruelly wronged me."

"He has ever been my bitter foe; he made me the outcast I now am, and drove me out here a fugitive by his acts of perfidy toward me."

"In the end I saw a chance for my revenge and to get back my own—to get this gold; so I came after him, and I find you his ally."

"I killed him, I admit, and now you confront me; but I ask you to give me a chance for my life—show that you are what men say you are, and meet me face to face as man to man, and may the best one of us win the game and get the gold."

"I see that you do not know me, as I would not touch one ounce of that man's gold, but would endeavor to send it to those to whom it justly belongs, for I cannot believe that he defrauded you, or was the man to wrong you, as you assert."

"He lived alone, but was respected; he worked hard and manfully earned his fortune, while you are, if the man I believe you to be, a hard citizen, an idler, and worse if reports are true. So I do not be-

what you say about Lone Hand Sam—one word of it.

As to giving you a chance for your life, do not deserve it at my hands; there is reason why I should risk my life against one, two, of a common robber, desperado and convicted murderer, but I will do as you demand meet you on your own terms."

Hand Sam, "Good! and may the best man win," cried and heir to the other, in a triumphant tone.

Which by the r See here, you think that you shot Lone and Sam dead just now?"

nt of this "I did."

who are afte "You did not."

It is all mi "You are mistaken."

you cover "What do you mean?"

l, and a h "He was already dead."

st out of "Ah! you had killed him, then?"

uching the "Oh no; I am no murderer, though duty ten forces me to take human life, as I will ve to take yours, soon."

ull upon "That remains to be seen; but what killed one Hand Sam?"

"I have an idea that you poisoned him."

"I poisoned him?" echoed the man.

"Yes, you poisoned his coffee in some manner, not daring to face him, and then followed his trail, expecting to find him dead as startled camp.

agon to r "You did find him dead, but I was here t he had guarding his body to give you a surprise o express party.

nd stood you, if I get you to the fort, so confess that you poisoned the miner."

he held The man laughed recklessly and replied:

already de "As you seem to know the facts, I'll not believed t deny it. Now you will give me my chance the wag for life by fighting a duel with me?"

proved "Yes, but in my own way, for I know his life my man," was the cool reply.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DUEL IN THE MOONLIGHT.

"Do you mean that you intend to take an advantage of me, Buffalo Bill?" asked the desperado.

"If I did, would I grant you a chance for your life?"

"What do you mean, then?"

"That I will risk no trickery on your part. You will die the instant you crook your finger."

"You appeal to me to give you a show, and I will do so, but in my own way; so, first, I will disarm you."

"That's giving me no show," growled the man.

"Wait and see."

With this Buffalo Bill stepped forward and unbuckled the belt of arms from the fellow's waist and tossed it to one side; then he unslung the rifle which the ruffian wore at his back.

This done, he passed his hands over him, still keeping the muzzle of the revolver close in his face, to see that he carried no other weapon.

"Now come with me," he ordered, and led the man twenty paces away, out into the open and full moonlight.

With a lariat he then bound his feet so that he could not break away in a dash to escape, and next placed one of the revolvers, taken from the desperado's belt, within ten paces of where he stood.

"Your weapon is loaded, for it is the one I took from your belt, and you know what you can do with it."

"I will place it here on the ground, then release your feet, and, at my command, you walk toward the gun, pick it up, and wheel and fire when you please."

"I will stand yonder, advance toward you, but will not fire until you have your weapon in hand and face me."

"Is not that fair?"

"If you do not shoot me down before I turn."

"If I wished to do that, I could kill you now with no risk to myself."

"True; but if you do play a square game, you are about the only man I know who would."

"Oh no; there are plenty of honorable men, and I will act by you as though there were others here to see that no advantage was taken either way."

"I have confidence in myself; I am a dead-shot and surely will kill you, though

I do not say you will not wound or kill me.

"Now I am ready, for the moon is clear of the clouds and the night is getting on."

With this the weapon was placed on the ground, the man was released of his bonds, and, stepping back a dozen yards, Buffalo Bill called out:

"I am ready!"

The ruffian wheeled quickly and fairly ran for his revolver.

The scout stood motionless, his revolver in hand, and full sixty feet from where lay the weapon of his antagonist.

So eager was the man to grasp the weapon that, in stooping, he fell, and a groan broke from his lips as he felt sure of a shot.

But he eagerly grasped the revolver, sprung to his feet, and as he did so turned and instantly pulled trigger, not waiting, even, until he had reached a full standing position.

His bullet was quickly aimed, yet well, for it cut through the brim of Buffalo Bill's hat!

But, quick as he was, the desperado did not get a chance to pull trigger a second time, for Buffalo Bill's shot followed the first report almost instantly, and it was fatal.

The man pitched forward and fell his full length upon his face, his finger just ready to touch trigger again.

"It was perhaps the best way out of it, for I hate to see a poor wretch hang, and his misery is over now," murmured the scout.

"I suppose I was a fool to take chances with him, for he was a dead-shot, but I could not refuse his appeal."

"Now to find his horse and put him with the others, and then to turn in, for I have two bodies on my hands instead of one."

"Yes, and a big lot of gold to carry to the fort with me, for I suppose Colonel Mayo can find the heirs of the dead gold-miner, as he must have some papers about him to show who he is."

With this Buffalo Bill went in search of the robber's horse, found him and staked him out with the others.

Then he placed the two bodies under the wagon, and next crawled in to secure much-needed rest.

It was just dawn when he awoke and came creeping out of the wagon, to suddenly behold a number of masked men confronting him, their rifles leveled full at him.

That there was not the slightest show for resistance was only too evident to the scout, taken so by surprise and off guard.

CHAPTER IX.

A SURPRISE FOR THE MASKED MEN.

IN the cramped quarters of the wagon, Buffalo Bill had not put on his belt of arms, which he had taken off when he lay down to sleep.

He had one foot out on the pole, the other in the wagon, and his weapons were not then easy to draw, when he saw that he had no less than five rifles covering him.

But he did not for an instant lose his nerve, and heard the words of the leader of the masked men unmoved:

"Lone Hand Sam, you are our game!"

"Pards, you are a trifle off, for there lies Lone Hand Sam, dead, under the wagon," was the reply of the intrepid scout.

The men started, for in the shadows of early morning they had not seen anything under the wagon.

Now they beheld two blanket-enveloped forms, and the leader cried:

"Who the blazes are you?"

"At the fort, where I am chief of scouts, they call me Buffalo Bill."

"Buffalo Bill?" came in a chorus from all.

"Yes; and, pray, who are you?"

"Gold-hunters."

"Gold-robbers, I take it, as you hide your faces."

"Well, if so you like it, yes, Buffalo Bill; but what are you doing here?"

"Being an honest man and you admitted-ly robbers, I ask you that question."

"We will give you a quick reply."

"Thanks!"

"We are here to get the gold of Lone Hand Sam."

"That's frank enough, and I'll tell you that I am here to protect it."

"We are five against one."

"I've fought greater odds and live to tell it."

"See here! We've got you cornered, and we'll kill you if you force it upon us, though I do not wish to do so—now."

"You are our prisoner, until we decide what to do with you."

Buffalo Bill saw that resistance was utter madness. Those five rifles would flash together and death was certain, so he could but yield, and did so gracefully, for he replied:

"I do not care to throw my life away, so I submit; but you know who I am and that I will be looked up if I do not appear at the fort, and my death avenged, so be warned."

With this he stepped off of the wagon-pole and faced his foes fearlessly.

"Take his weapons, pard," ordered the leader, addressing one of the men, who stepped forward, handed the scout's belt of arms out of the wagon, and then passed his hands carefully over him to see if he had any concealed arms about his clothes.

"Bind him securely, now," came the next order, which was obeyed by two of the men.

Buffalo Bill accepted his unfortunate position with the undisturbed serenity natural to him in such emergencies, and a peculiar smile which his captors neither understood or liked irradiated his features.

When his hands had been bound close to his side, and his feet secured as well, the scout was given a seat near the fire, which the outlaws now started to build up preparatory to getting breakfast, the leader seating himself near his prisoner as though for a talk.

"Well, you've got something to say, so out with it," remarked the scout.

"I've got some questions to ask you."

"Ask them."

"What did you kill Lone Hand Sam for?"

"I did not kill him."

"He's dead."

"Yes, murdered."

"Who murdered him?"

"The man lying next to him there."

The masked leader of the band bent his eyes curiously upon the forms under the wagon.

He now saw that there appeared to be two forms, a fact he had not before observed, with the saddles, harness, and other things piled up there.

"Who is the other one?"

"I think he is a man I have seen in Gold Dust Valley, a miner, gambler or whatever you choose to call him, by the name of Alf Ellis, or at least so called."

The leader was on his feet with a cry of surprise, and exclamations of amazement broke from the others of the band who had heard the scout's words.

"Alf Ellis?" echoed the chief, springing forward toward the wagon.

"You appear to know him."

The man made no reply, but quickly drew the blankets from the dead form.

There was revealed the handsome, calm face of the gold-miner, with a wound in his temple, his hand shattered by a bullet, from the cruel fire poured upon him by the man who had not known he was dead.

Close by his side was the form of the murderer. A bullet wound was in the center of his forehead, where the scout had sent a dead-center shot.

"Pards, it is the chief!"

"Great terrors! what does this mean?" cried the man whose words now indicate to the reader that he was Buck Bradley, whom Dick Drew, the lieutenant of the Ten of Diamonds had sent on the trail of Lone Hand Sam, the gold-miner.

CHAPTER X.

A VANISHED TREASURE.

BUFFALO BILL calmly gazed upon the scene, the excitement of the masked men, all of whom had run to the wagon when the discovery was made of their chief being dead.

And the scout was jotting down in his mind notes and signs for future reference.

"The chief, you say? Is he not the man known as Alf Ellis?" he asked.

Instantly there was a dead silence.

The men felt that in their excitement they had said too much—had betrayed a secret.

"Yes, I guess he's Ellis, but he's not the man I at first thought, when I said he was the chief," assured Bradley, evasively.

"You are not telling the truth, and you don't fool me even a little bit!" was Buffalo Bill's prompt rejoinder.

"So Alf Ellis is your chief, is he? and he tried to play a lone hand, it seems, to ouster you others out of the miner's gold. Nice chief, he was!" contemptuously.

"And you were to play the same game on him—to play the joker to his right bower!"

"Well, you've played; the chief has gone on his last trail, and you'll get there, all the same, in due time!"

The men stood in awkward silence. They were sorely puzzled, as well as incensed, that Buffalo Bill should have read the chief's action aright—that he had pretended to go to the upper camps, while in reality he was intending to follow Lone Hand Sam alone and secure his treasure for himself.

But, how came the scout to know all this? They must know, for if he really knew so much, their own safety depended on his being silenced then and there.

So Buck Bradley said:

"I guess that is Alf Ellis; in fact, I'm sure of it. But he's not the chief as I at first supposed. They was a great deal alike, so I mistook."

"But, I say, how was it the—I mean Alf Ellis got kilt?"

"I killed him," was the business-like reply.

"You did? You killed him?"

"Yes; it was I who sent him to Satan for judgment!"

"And who kilt Lone Hand Sam?"

"Your chief did."

"I said he wasn't our chief."

"Ah, so you did. Well, Alf Ellis murdered the miner, to rob him."

"But didn't get away with the boodle?"

"Not much he didn't!"

"Why not? Tell us that!"

"A man about my size was in the way."

"I see; but give us the particulars!"

"Well, I don't mind telling you, for there is no secret about it."

"I have been off on a trail, and was returning to the fort, when I heard a horse neigh. The neigh led me to this camp, and I rode up to find Lone Hand Sam, whom I knew, dead, and—"

"He was dead when you got here?"

"Yes, and had been since he ate his breakfast, for the man lying by his side there had poisoned his coffee to murder him, and then had followed on his trail, as I decided he would be sure to do, to reap the harvest of his cowardly act without risk to himself."

Through their masks the five men glanced excitedly at each other, but made no comment.

Continuing, Buffalo Bill told the story, just as all had occurred, of the cunning of Alf Ellis, what he had said, how he had fired upon the head of the already dead miner, when the scout thrust it out of the wagon; and how, as he let the body fall, Ellis had emptied his revolver into it, to then find himself held up by Buffalo Bill.

The appeal of Alf Ellis, the duel, and what followed the scout also related, the five men listening with the deepest attention until the end.

Then Buck Bradley remarked:

"Well, Buffalo Bill, it's all a very pretty story, and I guess it's about true, but, as we came here for the gold, we'll plant the bodies after we have had breakfast, and then push on with the boodle, taking you along as a prisoner, until we are sure of an escape. Then we'll let you go, for, although we know you are our foe, you have done a great deal of good service on the border so we don't want to kill you."

"No, we really don't!" echoed the others.

"Thanks! you are very kind," was the sarcastic reply.

"Don't thank us, for you ain't just safe yet."

"Now, pards, let us have breakfast, then bury the bodies and get out of this."

"I'll look over the bodies to see what they

have on them that may be useful to us. But how about that poison, Buffalo Bill?"

The scout pointed to the can of coffee, and all the men scrutinizing it closely, saw that it had something in it which might be taken for grains of sugar.

They then threw all the open packages of food belonging to the miner out, and Buck Bradley in searching the body of Alf Ellis suddenly came upon a paper containing a white substance precisely like what had been found in the coffee, while upon it was written:

"Deadly Poison."

A leather wallet containing papers, a belt heavy with gold, and some jewelry and diamonds he also found upon the body of Ellis, while a search of the dead miner revealed nothing, or, if otherwise, he did not make the fact known to his confederates.

"Now, pards, I'll see about what our fortune is," and Bradley, scrambled into the wagon.

For a few moments he was heard pulling things about; then there was a wild, almost diabolical yell, followed by the startling words:

"Pards, we are done for! These leather bags are filled with rocks not gold-dust or nuggets!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE INVISIBLE RESCUER.

THE words of Buck Bradley startled and surprised Buffalo Bill as much as they did the masked men awaiting around the wagon.

At the exclamation all of the gang rushed to the wagon, the bags were thrown out, and it was revealed that their leader had told the truth: the strong leather bags were, indeed, all filled with rocks.

The stones were of all sizes, from a grain to a small egg, and it was seen that they had been washed with or steeped in a gold-yellow paint, well calculated to deceive at a casual glance.

But to the experienced eye of a miner the cheat was evident at a closer inspection, and Buck Bradley was an expert.

Either Lone Hand Sam had hidden his gold, to come back after it, so as not to lose it, if held up, or Buffalo Bill had concealed it and perpetrated the deception: this was the thought which flashed through the mind of each of the five would-be robbers.

When assured that they had not captured a dollar's worth of gold, all turned toward their prisoner, who, unfortunately for himself, laughed as he saw their fury and surprise.

At once they pounced upon him.

"This is your work, Scout Cody! You have hidden the gold and filled the bags with rocks," fairly shouted Buck Bradley.

"I only wish I had."

"Do you admit it?"

"No; I am as much surprised as you are. But it was a very clever act in Lone Hand Sam, although, as the poor fellow is dead, I fear his gold is forever lost to his heirs."

"We are his heirs by right of might, and you, not Lone Hand Sam, played the clever game, so give up that gold or take the consequences!"

A yell of approval from the others answered this threat, while Buffalo Bill responded:

"I know nothing whatever of the gold."

"If you don't tell where it is, you shall not be alive in half an hour."

The now imperiled scout did not flinch, but looked around him in a peculiar way, which the ruffians did not like, for his mien and manner led them to suspect that he was momentarily expecting help.

They knew that he often scouted miles ahead of a command of soldiers, or his own men, and there might, therefore, be aid near.

This fear impressed them so that a conference was held out of the prisoner's hearing, at which it, apparently, was determined to carry matters to an extremity, for the five men gathered around the helpless Cody, and, taking a lariat, Buck Bradley said:

"See here, Buffalo Bill! It is your life or that gold. I'll give you just five minutes to decide whether you will guide us to it or be strung up to your death."

"I know nothing about the gold; I swear

it; and if I hang for it, I can say more!"

"Then hang you shall! If you th— now, we shall have our revenge."

Cody fully realized that the outlaws what they said; but, what could he do?

He was not a man to betray fear; show trepidation; on the contrary, his nerves so savored of confidence, that the ruffians proceeded to quicker actions.

Buck Bradley impatiently called out:

"Come, men! waiting will do no— We must string him up right away."

He feels the rope about his neck, he'll talk or die."

With this the lariat noose was cast his neck, and the other end was about thrown over the limb of a tree a few distant, when—

The sharp crack of a rifle was heard a couple of hundred yards distant!

Buck Bradley dropped dead at the feet of the scout!

The ringing rally-call of a bugle heard in the distance!

A yell of triumph broke from the lips of Buffalo Bill!

The four remaining masked men dashed away with the speed of frightened deer, disappeared in the thicket bordering the stream.

The bound scout heard them plunge the water, and knew then that they crossed to seek safety in the hills and the timber on the other side of the creek.

He looked around expectantly for his rescuer, the one who had fired the fatal shot, and listened for the rapid hoof-strokes of coming cavalry.

He saw no one! heard no one!

In amazement he stood listening and watching.

Then he heard the plunge of a horse in the stream, but saw no one.

A moment more, and there came clearly his hearing a ringing shout from the horseman, who also must have crossed the stream.

Then, soon, a shot; and, another.

But, that was all. He saw no one, heard no more.

No cavalry appeared, and he was alone with the dead.

All was as silent as the unconsciousness of sleep or forgetfulness.

A few moments thus; then he heard the distant call of a bugle across the stream, whither the fugitives had gone; but, once again all was silence.

Buffalo Bill, mystified beyond all expression or explanation over these incidents, did not longer delay; to free himself was his immediate duty.

His own belt of arms lay near, where it had been tossed, and his knife was sharp; so, rolling toward it, he drew the weapon from the scabbard, was able to grasp it in his right hand, and soon severed the lariat that had imprisoned his wrists.

His feet were next freed, and though still wondering about his strange rescuer—for now he was convinced that there could have been but one person and that a horseman—he began preparations for a rapid flight, apprehending the early return of the outlaws, and knowing, too, that his invisible friend would follow his trail for his further protection.

The horses were quickly brought up and harnessed; his own, Alf Ellis's and the five animals of the outlaws were hitched behind the wagon; the bodies and traps were loaded in it, and, in an incredibly short time, the lucky scout was leaving the spot, so fatal to three others, so nearly fatal to himself, driving the team as rapidly from the scene as the rough trail would permit.

"Who could have been his clever, daring and invisible rescuer?"

That was the riddle he must solve!

CHAPTER XII.

LIKE AN APPARITION.

ALL day long did Buffalo Bill push along with his team and the led horses.

He felt that he had more than he could handle, and was anxious to reach the fort with all possible dispatch, even though he drove his horses hard.

His Invisible Rescuer could and would follow, he well knew, and far more rapidly than he could proceed, so he naturally ex-

for it, I can say to see him come up with him each shall! If you th- baffled outlaws being afoot he did our revenge." comprehend their reappearance; but he d that the outlaw knew that he was in a dangerous coun- what could he do? hostile Indians were roving over- an to betray fear; and, besides, a band of rene- confidence, that lawless white men could be tempted- icker actions. him of a wagon load of gold, as they- tently called ou believe, and a fine lot of horses. ing will do no- Buffalo Bill for these reasons would not- p right away. straining animals, hoping to reach a- his neck, he'll umping-place that night and be within- stance of the fort.

It was just about sunset when he went- end was about amp on a timber ridge, and as he got- of a tree a few- rses staked out and was preparing to- a rifle was he- eaten only a "snack," in his half-hour- distant! at noon, he discerned, afar off over the- dead at the fe- a couple of horses and riders.

Turning his field-glass upon them, to his- rise he saw that one was an officer in- of a bugle- rm, the other a woman. They were- e from the lip- g their horses hard, and the animals- asked men da- ed much jaded; that much he clearly- ghened deer, e out. et bordering- e nature of the ground about the ridge- them plunge- such that he could not ride a horse- n that they- dly over it; so he decided to go on foot- hills and th- head the officer and his companion off,- he creek. they must pass within a mile of where- ntly for his- was then standing. l the fatal sh- earing that they might turn from their- of-strokes of- l, if they saw him, suspecting that he- ne! a foe, he took advantage of a wash ex- listening- far out from the ridge into the plain,- f a horse in- near the further end of which the appar- ame clearly- fugitives must pass. m the hors- They are pursued by some one, I feel- d the stream- e, and they are going out of their way to- her. ch the fort. no one, hear- At this distance I cannot tell, and in the- e was alon- rkening light, but they must be Major- clousness o- nham and his daughter, for they often- e heard th- ke long rides together, though, why they- the stream- ould have come this far, unless they are- but, once- at, I cannot understand."

While thus musing, the scout was going- all expres- wn the steep side of the ridge to reach the- dents, dic- ain, and was soon in "the water-way" which- as his im- tended out from the hills into the plain.

It was dark now, but he knew that the- where it- moon, at its full that night, must soon rise,- harp; so,- nd he had time to head the couple off, in- on from- ending to call to him if he could not get- it in his- ery near. iat that

As he neared the end of the wash the orb- gh still- f night rose over the distant hills and- er—for- f lighted his way; then he quickened his- ld have- pace. eman-

But, just as he was about to leave the- ht, ap- wash, he heard not a hundred yards away- tlaw, a- the sound of hoof-falls, followed instantly- friend- by the stern command: had come to a halt.

"Halt, thar, major, for we has headed yer- From another water wash a hundred feet- protec- off!" the other side of them, had come the com-

Instantly Buffalo Bill, as he was about to- and- spring from the cover of the wash, out upon- e five- the plain, crouched down and peered up over- hind- the bank.

He beheld the officer and his lady compan- aded the- ion not sixty feet away from him, and they- al to- had come to a halt.

From another water wash a hundred feet- the- command that had checked them in their flight.

"In what way you have headed us off, I- ng- do not know; but unarmed as I am, I can- g- but yield to you," was the officer's answer.

"It is Major Benham, for I know his voice, and that is Miss Nellie with him!"

"I am just in time; but, who are those fellows who are hidden yonder?" Buffalo Bill asked himself.

In rejoinder to the words of the officer was rude laughter, and then the menace:

"You bet you'll yield, or get a bullet through yer heart! yer was durned clever ter escape us yer did, but we headed yer, and you is our game ag'in, and it's worth more to yer fer givin' us ther slip."

"Come, Nat, we'll lead them over to ther ridge whar we left our hosses, and then go back ther short cut we come, fer we hain't no time ter lose, as the sojers will be on our trail, and maybe Buffalo Bill, and that, yer knows, means a heap."

All this the fort scout distinctly heard, and from his place of concealment he saw the officer and his daughter halted not far away, both gazing toward the spot where

were their yet unseen foes, for, like the scout, they were in a water-wash.

The moon was well up above the horizon now, and its light rendered all perfectly distinct.

It revealed to the watching scout first one then another man clambering up out of the wash, and, side by side, each grasping a revolver, the two started toward their victims.

He observed that they carried no rifles, for which fact he was glad, because, in his haste, he had left his own repeater in camp.

A revolver in each hand, he suddenly leaped out of the wash and advanced toward the two men.

"Buffalo Bill is here!" came in distinct tones, as the scout suddenly appeared before the startled vision of captors and captives, apparently as though by magic from the ground.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DOUBLE DUEL.

THEN came an exclamation from the officer, a glad cry from the young girl, and bitter execrations of surprise from the two men who had deemed the game all their own, as they beheld Buffalo Bill so suddenly and unexpectedly appear before them.

The moonlight fell full upon the handsome face and imposing form of the scout, and all seemed to know him at a glance.

The officer and young girl saw that he stood with a revolver in each hand, both cocked, one half leveled, and that he had, for a man of his quickness and nerve, a slight advantage, since he could fire before the others, whose weapons were not as ready, for a second of time meant much to a man like Buffalo Bill.

When the scout saw that the two men made no immediate move to open fire upon him, after uttering the startling words that told of his presence, and were a defiance to them, Buffalo Bill, watching them as a cat might a mouse, said:

"Well, is it a fight or a foot-race? But I don't run, you know!"

"It's none of your business to chip in here, Buf'ler Bill," growled one of the men.

"Then you'll have to put me out of the game, for I'm in it to the end."

"Dare you meet us both, after all yer boasted talk about being afraid of no man?"

"I have made no such boast; none but a coward brags; but I've caught you two men in deviltry, and, as Major Benham and his daughter are in trouble, I am here to see them through. Now, what do you intend to do—fight or back down?"

"We'll fight yer fer ther game if yer makes it a stand-up ag'in' both of us, for yer is Buffalo Bill, and we grants what you kin do, but maybe we kin down you."

"All right! If Major Benham will see fair play, I'll go you," was the reckless response of the scout.

"No, Cody, there is nothing like fair play in one against two, for though I know what you are capable of, these men are desperate characters, one of them being the deserter, Scott, from my regiment, the other the man known as Outlaw Oil.

"We were out for a ride, my daughter and I, and were stopped by these fellows, who demand an enormous ransom for our return, and which I intended to arrange to pay; but they left us alone, binding me securely."

"Nellie was not very securely bound, so she freed herself and me; then we mounted our horses and escaped; but these fellows knew a shorter trail and headed us off, for, being unarmed, I could offer no resistance."

"As you are at a disadvantage, I am sorry you have appeared upon the scene."

"Yes, Mr. Cody, you can get aid from the fort and trail us, so do not think of facing those two renegades, brave as you are," said Nellie Benham, earnestly.

"It is just what I will do! I am not here to back down, miss."

"They have given the challenge, Major Benham, and I only ask you to see fair play and give the word," said Buffalo Bill, firmly.

"All right! Let ther major give ther word, and ther game begins," assented one of the men.

"I am ready, sir," and without once taking his eyes off the two fellows, Buffalo Bill stood at bay.

"If I were only armed, Cody, we could make this an even thing," observed the major.

"But, yer hain't, and ther moment Buffalo Bill moves ter give yer a weapon we opens fire, so what yer going ter do about it?" demanded Outlaw Oil, viciously.

"We are only delaying matters, Major Benham, so kindly give the word."

"These men are showing no mercy, or consideration, as they would have you believe, by not firing on me, for they dare not make a move to do so, and they know it!"

"With you giving the word the spell will be broken; and if they can fire more quickly, and with better aim than I can, they are more than welcome."

"You bet we is welcome," growled Scott, the deserter.

"This is a strange position for an army officer to be placed in, yet I see no way it can be avoided, so I yield to the force of circumstances," Benham had to admit.

"You men will certainly not object to my daughter riding off, that she may not be a witness to a scene of bloodshed?"

"You bet we objects! Not much she don't go, to skip off and lose us our ransom."

"Father, I would not think of going!" assured the brave girl, promptly. "I am a soldier's daughter, and can look upon this duel without flinching, though again I say it is infamous for a brave man to face two others—cowards though they both are!" was the spirited reply of Nellie.

"As circumstances place you in this unfortunate position, Major Benham, I see no way out of it but for you to serve as a second to these men and myself."

"Nor do I, Cody, and I will. I wish you two men to step backward ten paces; and, Cody, you will do the same."

"This will place you about a hundred feet apart, and I will give the command:

"Forward, march, fire!"

"You are to step off at the word march, but not raise your weapons until the word fire."

"You, Cody, I know will obey, but should either of those men make an effort to fire before the word, it is for you to act as quickly as you can."

"Are you ready?"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SAVING RUSE.

THE two desperadoes had listened attentively to what the major had to say, for both had expected he would be sure to make an unfair arrangement for them, or in some way favor the scout.

They were mistaken, as they had to admit to themselves. What the officer ordered was as fair for them as for their opponent, save they had the odds so greatly in their favor.

They would not have argued a moment, or accepted any terms, had they held a shadow of an advantage; but they knew Buffalo Bill's piercing eyes, his lightning-like aim and deadly style of shooting, and he held their murderous purpose in check simply because he had the slight advantage of being a second or more prepared for firing—which meant a great deal in that emergency.

But now, at a hundred feet, and in the moonlight, the chances were that they could get their weapons entirely ready without its being noticed.

As for waiting for the word to fire, they had not the remotest idea of doing that. Their game was to shoot at the first word which left the major's lips.

Two against one, the chances were that they could kill the scout, or wound him, before he could fire, for treacherous as they were themselves, they did not doubt that Buffalo Bill would await the command to fire.

So they slowly backed the number of paces ordered, each quickly raising his weapon as he did so.

"They are raising their weapons, Mr. Cody," called out Nellie Benham.

Perfectly calm the scout's answer: "I am watching them, thank you, Miss Benham."

"Cowards! down with your hands to your

side, if you intend to act in any way fair!" cried the irate major.

"We know what we is about. You give ther word; we'll do ther rest," answered Outlaw Oll, doggedly.

"Be on your guard, Cody, for they are treacherous as vipers."

"Yes, major; I will fight the devil with fire," was the answer.

Another moment and then amid the death-like stillness, came the resonant voice of Major Benham:

"Are you ready?"

"Forward—"

Before another word could be uttered two shots rung out together, followed in the fraction of a second by two more.

There were two falls, but it seemed that all three men were downed, and a thrill of horror passed over Nellie Benham, while something like a moan came from her father's lips.

But, almost on the instant, the tall form of the scout was seen to tower up to its full height, and, with quick stride, and revolver in hand, he strode toward the two desperadoes, who lay as they had fallen.

"They are dead, sir!" Buffalo Bill calmly announced.

"But you are wounded, Mr. Cody, for you fell!" cried Nellie Benham.

Then to the relief of the major and his daughter came the reply:

"No, it was a trick I thought justifiable as I knew they meant to fire before the word."

"I dropped as their revolvers came to a level, and fired while on my knees; but their shots were well aimed, as one cut through my hat, and another just chipped my shoulder. No, it is nothing, Miss Benham, only a scratch."

As the men were dead, Buffalo Bill then informed Major Benham that his camp was away on the ridge a mile, and added:

"I have a strange story to tell, sir, but not here and now. We will follow the wash back to the ridge, where the horses of these men must be, and I'll return with them for the bodies."

"No need of that extra work, Cody, for we can throw them across my horse, and I'll follow you on foot."

This was done, and half a mile away the two horses of the outlaws were found.

As the bodies were already tied upon the major's horse the two animals were pressed into use by the scout and the officer, the former leading the way to his camp.

"We'll have a wagon full of bodies to carry to the fort, sir," suggested Buffalo Bill, as he placed the forms of the two outlaws in the wagon with those of Lone Hand Sam, Alf Ellis and Buck Bradley.

"It seems that you have seen deadly work, Cody."

"Yes, major; but I'll get supper first and tell you about it afterward, for as our horses are all tired it would be best to camp here to-night and push on to the fort in the morning, for we can make Miss Benham comfortable."

This was decided upon, and the horses were staked out, a fire built, supper prepared, Nellie Benham insisting upon doing her share, and then the three sat down for a talk.

Buffalo Bill narrated his story as it had happened, and asked Major Benham if any of the scouts were off on the trail, for he felt assured that it must have been one of his men who had been his unseen rescuer.

But the major happened to know that all the scouts were at the fort, none having gone out since their chief left, and no force of soldiers, either, were away so who the mysterious rescuer could be Buffalo Bill could not imagine.

He was both pleased and perplexed over the trail mystery.

Nellie Benham was made as comfortable on the ground for the night, as circumstances would permit, she declining to have the dead disturbed and take the wagon.

The night passed without disturbance, and bright and early the next morning the march was taken up for the fort.

CHAPTER XV.

NO CLUE.

BUFFALO BILL could but appreciate his peculiar position.

Within twenty-four hours he had passed

through a series of strange adventures indeed, and from being alone upon the trail his force had increased in a most gruesome and weird manner.

He had a bag full of "rocks," five corpses, Major Benham and his daughter, and a lot of horses.

The chief of scouts directed the way which the major led, his daughter riding by his side, the scout driving the wagon with its weird load, and the horses in the lead bringing up the rear.

Leaving the ridge they made their way across the plains, to suddenly come upon a large force of cavalry, out from the fort on the hunt for the major and his daughter.

The troopers cheered as they saw that those they searched for were safe, for the major was universally popular and Nellie Benham was admired and loved by all.

When the officer in command of the troops told the major that there were half a dozen other search parties out after them, under scouts who knew the country well, couriers were at once dispatched to find and bring them in, while now under strong escort the little outfit pressed on to its destination.

Being told by an officer in command of one of the squads of cavalry that one of his best scouts had taken a trail that few men dared to follow, as it led to a canyon in the mountains where it was said that a madman dwelt, a man whose life was a mystery and who was dreaded by both palefaces and Indians, Buffalo Bill hastily decided to ride after his pard, Bent Soule, and turn him back.

Accordingly he directed the command to continue on toward the fort, while he went to hunt up Soule.

By rapid riding he soon came to the place where the scout had been seen, and taking up his trail pushed on, almost in a run, for mile after mile.

Suddenly he halted, as he heard the words:

"Ah! chief, it is you?"

"I heard your rapid riding, and not knowing whom to expect, just laid for you," and Bent Soule stepped out of the timber in front of Buffalo Bill.

"Yes, Bent, I came after you when Captain Nesbit told me you had taken this trail."

"Where are you going?"

After a moment of silence the scout replied:

"I'll tell you, chief, that which I am pledged not to tell."

"Half a year ago I came upon a man in a death struggle with a bear, and chippin' in, I killed the big brute."

"The man was badly used up, and wounded; but I took him to his home, a den in the mountains, and cared for him there, ten days, then leaving him, as being able to care for himself."

"He was the madman whom all in this region seem to fear; but he is no more mad than I am, and does no harm to any one that I know of; only protects himself when assailed."

"He told me his life had been a mistake—that all had gone wrong with him, and he simply had given up the world and hidden here to live and die in these wilds."

"But he begged me to reveal nothing about him, and told me to come to him if he could serve me in any way, for he knew this country perfectly."

"As Major Benham and sweet Miss Nellie have been captured, I was on my way to get his help."

Buffalo Bill told of his rescue of the major and his daughter, and went on to say:

"Bent, let us go on to see this recluse, for I now wish to meet him. I have an idea that he may have known Lone Hand Sam and can, if he will, give me much particular information regarding the masked scoundrels who were on the miner's trail."

"It may be possible, but I don't think he will talk much, however much he may know, or may have discovered. He is out on his lone trail, day and night, and that is why so many men fear him, but even to me he imparted very little information. We must go to his cave on foot and wholly disarmed, to prove that we are not his foes."

"I agree to that," was the answer; and, after half an hour more in the saddle, they

dismounted, and leaving their

climbed the mountain to the den of exile. As they appeared in front of the cave they beheld him seated in its entrance, a rock, bareheaded, his gray hair unkempt, rawhide sandals lashed over his feet, his hands clasped over his knees in a picture of perfect repose.

"I saw you coming, pard, and red your friend, for I have seen him out free, though he never saw me, I think; and ing who he was, felt sure his mission of peace."

The words were calmly uttered, and falo Bill gazed upon the mountain with deepest interest.

But all efforts to obtain information in vain. If he knew Lone Hand Sam would not admit it, and gave no sign had any suspicions in regard to the scout had sworn to run down.

Cody adverted to his mysterious and seemed half inclined to believe the lonely denizen of the hills could reveal that mystery, but the recluse was impenetrable under the examination. If he was to give it, it never would be learned from his admission, that was evident.

The chief of scouts then sought to persuade the solitary dweller to abandon cave life and to become one of his men, but the answer was:

"No, I have long lived here, and will continue until I die. I cannot help fraternize with men. If you come this some time and find my bones, just bury them, and that will be the end."

"Had you not rescued the officer's lady, sir, I might have helped find her, and some day, if you require my aid in hunting down outlaws or redskins, come to me. That is all; good-by!"

The two visitors, thus virtually dismissed, turned away, regained their horses, and rode rapidly back on the trail they had come.

[And here let us add, as closing the record of this wilderness exile, that Buffalo Bill revisited the cave, a year later, to find the remains of the dead man, prone on his couch of skins, as if having met death peacefully.]

A careful examination of the cave had failed to give any clue as to the recluse's identity, or as to his past history. Evidence was found to prove that he was educated, refined, and probably a person of consequence, but not a scrap of writing to lead the way to any revelation.

So the body was left undisturbed on its couch. Nothing was disturbed within the cave; everything was left there as it had been found. The entrance to the cave was carefully blocked up with great boulders, and the unknown dead given the obscurity which, in life, he so sought.]

The two scouts, by hard riding, overtook the command, which reached the fort late in the afternoon. A grand welcome was given them, and in telling their story of the rescue, and of the double duel, both Major Benham and Nellie spoke so admiringly of the courage and nerve of Buffalo Bill that another star was added to his escutcheon of prowess.

But nothing was then said of the wagon and the three other bodies and all felt that a mystery was attached to them which those who knew did not care to reveal.

Closeted with Colonel Mayo, the commandant of Fort Advance, and Major Benham, Buffalo Bill again told of his coming upon the little camp and of what had followed.

The colonel listened most attentively, and then sent for the post hunter, an old man who knew the mines and the frequenters of the camps thoroughly.

The grizzly, bronzed-faced old veteran borderman came promptly, saluted the officers in his rough way, greeted Buffalo Bill with a hearty hand-shake, and turning to the colonel, said:

"I'm yer sarvent, sir."

"Grizzly Dan, I wish to ask you what you know about Alf Ellis, a miner of Gold Dust Valley?"

"Col'nel, nuthin' good, nuthin' downright bad. He claims ter be a miner, but gambles more than he digs, and I guess he gits more gold on ther tarn of a keerd then with pick or shovel."

leaving their
in to the den of

"I got a way of seemin' double, ter in front of t he do git around in more places ed in its entrather same time than any man I his gray hair an andals lashed yer axed me what I thought, I'd say ed over his k a downright devil; ef yer axed me ose. know'd ag'in' him, I'd say nuthin'; pard, and red's clever, on ther whole, gives his ave seen hin out free, wears diamonds and has ne, I think; anome killin'; he hain't quarrelsome, but re his mission with a gun and full o' narve. let's all I knows, sir."

ny uttered, and you ever hear that he belonged to a he mountain of road-agents?"

o, sir, though he has a lot o' pards in information along in about the same racket he Lone Hand Sam and Gold-Dusters calls 'em ther 'Ten gave no signmonds, 'cause they wears shiners."

ard to the n ow what bands of outlaws do you about on the trails and in the mines?" mysterious r knows there is some thet holds up ther to believe thes, trains and robs camps, but I don't s could reveal whar they belongs or ther camps, nor use was im numbers."

If he was t Now I wish to have you tell me what rned from h know in regard to a gold miner known as t. Hand Sam."

en sought t Just what all others does, sir." to abando What is that?" ne of his s Nuthin'."

here, and w Stayed at his cabin many a time, for cannot he about as welcoming a man as ever I see. ou come thie like him in all these parts."

ones, just A good fellow?" A all-round good feller, col'nel—square the officer they make 'em, afeerd o' nothin', minds ped find own affairs, has his hand in his pocket ure my a them in distress; and I hopes that he hev dskins, comack it rich as they say he has."

ally dismiss Lone Hand Sam." But, his other name?"

r horses But, his other name?" they had co No one knows, at least in the mines." ing the re Now go to the hospital and have a look Buffalo the bodies there, and see if you know to find them."

prone u Grizzly Dan started off on his mission, but g met d s back in ten minutes, and somewhat ex- edly said:

cave h "Col'nel, somebody has been usin' a gun the recludetty peert, and I knows four of them as Eviden's cashed in ther chips."

as educat "Which do you know, Grizzly Dan?" of con "I knows my poor pard, Lone Hand Sam, ing to led I wants ter trail ther man as kilt him, hat's my right, ye see."

rbred on "I knows Alf Ellis, but it hain't fer me er take up his killin' as it b "I knows them two, Scotty ther Deserter e cave w nd Outlaw Oll, and him as has kilt them bowld e done the hull world a good sarvice."

obscu "And the fifth man?" "Don't know him, sir."

overtor So Grizzly Dan was told the story, but in- formed that he must keep it a secret, and ome w when he departed Colonel Mayo observed y of the "Well, Cody, we can find no clue as to th Maj who this Lone Hand Sam was, or to the man rlingly killed by your unseen rescuer; so what is to Bill th be done?"

cheon c "Allow me to take the trail, sir, and try to solve the mystery," was the scout's re- ponse.

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CHAPTER XVI.

THE SCOUT'S DOUBLE MISSION.

In response to the request of Buffalo Bill, Colonel Mayo replied:

"Well, Cody, I suppose I will have to spare you for this service, though you are really needed at the fort now, as the Indians are showing a very uneasy spirit indeed."

"Did you make any discoveries on your scout which, though you went off on a red-skin trail, terminated in such a different manner?"

"I scouted up into the Indian country, sir, and it is my opinion the redskins intend no move for some time, for they are not just ready yet."

"It was upon my return that I came upon Lone Hand Sam's camp, sir."

"Well, we are here to render service of all kinds, and I desire that the dead gold-miner's fortune be not lost to his heirs if it can be helped."

"The men who followed to rob him, and whose leader your unseen rescuer killed, got, you say, what papers the miner had,

and they may be the key to where he buried his gold."

"Now for him to so cleverly plan to load the leather bags with rocks, to be carried off if he was held up, while he could, later, return for his gold, is conclusive proof to my mind that he had hidden away a large fortune."

"These outlaws should not be allowed to get this, and so I wish you to try and find out who the would-be robbers were, and who Sam really was:—in fact, solve the whole mystery."

"That I am anxious to do, sir, for you remember I owe the miner my life."

"True; and you can have what help you need, outside of your own men, for if you can corral those outlaws you will render the country a great service, and I will be glad to give you my personal co-operation."

"Thank you, Colonel Mayo; but I don't believe I shall require any help—at least at present. In fact, sir, I prefer to play a lone hand, so to speak, at least until I gather up the threads of the case."

"You know best, Cody."

"I desire to find out who Lone Hand Sam was; to whom his gold belongs; where the treasure is hidden and keep it from falling into the hands of those four outlaws who escaped; and also I particularly wish to discover what there was between the gold-miner and that man, Alf Ellis, for I am sure there was something between them."

"Doubtless, from what the man Ellis told you, and the way he went to work to rob the miner after first poisoning him. That very poisoning may imply something more than to get possession of the gold."

"Then I am curious, sir, to know who my invisible ally is, the man who saved me from being hanged, for that those men intended to hang me I am perfectly sure."

"You see, Colonel Mayo, I have the clue at least that the unseen rescuer played the bugle, and therefore had one with him; but when he crossed the stream I heard some shots, and it may be that he brought down an outlaw or two, or possibly may himself have been killed."

"Ah, yes; you did not know the result of that firing?"

"No, sir, for I pulled out, expecting him to follow me; so I now wish to return to the scene and see what I can find out."

"True; but there is something I wish you to do, Cody."

"Certainly, sir."

"The last coach in brought two Englishmen—a gentleman and a half companion, half servant."

"The former is rather reticent as to just what his business is out here in this wilderness, but from what he told me I have an idea that he is in search of a son, or some kinsman, whom he has reason to believe is in Gold Dust Valley; at least, he is looking for some one, and he made the request of me for a trustworthy guide to take him through the mining country."

"As there is no coach to Gold Dust Valley, he must go on horseback. He has ample means to purchase his horses and a complete outfit, while, as he has traveled much, has visited a number of the frontier posts, you will not find him and his man tenderfeet, by any means."

"When does he wish to go, sir?"

"He will go at any time."

"I will be glad to guide them, sir, to Gold Dust Valley, and through the mines, if necessary, for I can pick up information I wish on the way."

"All right; make your preparations accordingly, and I will see that the dead miner is properly buried, apart from the others, and the wagon and horses looked after, in case the heirs are found."

After further conversation as to details, Buffalo Bill left for his quarters, and began preparations for his journey, which now was to be a double mission.

That evening he saw the miner's body given burial over in the officers' burying-ground, but the outlaws were placed apart, their graves unmarked.

Presented to the Englishman, whom he found to be a bluff, genial man, fully able to take care of himself under ordinary circumstances, Buffalo Bill arranged with him to depart the next morning, early, and to leave his horses and outfit all ready for him.

The sun was just rising the next morning, when the scout rode out of the fort with Horace Stinson, as the Englishman was called riding by his side, and Maxwell, the servant, following leading a well-laden pack-horse.

That Mr Horace Stinson was much pleased with the man who was to be his guide, there was no doubt, and Buffalo Bill had not been an hour on the trail before he voted the Englishman and his companion downright good fellows, men to be relied upon when called on for help.

Pushing steadily ahead, Buffalo Bill was anxious to reach the camp which had proven so fatal to Lone Hand Sam, and which had very nearly been the scene of his own death, so as to halt there for the night, for, early the next morning he was determined to discover what he could in regard to the fate of his unknown and unseen rescuer, the man with the bugle.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MAD RUNAWAY.

THE distant hills, where the camp of Lone Hand Sam had been located, were drawing nearer and nearer as the party rode across the plains, and already the country had begun to assume an undulating form, when Buffalo Bill said:

"In another half-hour, Mr. Stinson, we will reach the camp I have in view, and have ample time to make ourselves comfortable before darkness sets in."

"It has been a long ride to-day, and I have pushed the horses a little, but then I was anxious to make this camp to-night for important reasons which I will explain later."

"You have not worried me in the least, Mr. Cody, by the ride, and if you kept on all night you would never hear a word from Maxwell, for he is used to roughing it and is as tough as rawhide," was the answer.

But the scout had halted while the Englishman was speaking. A sound had reached his ears which the others had not heard.

His well-trained horse, however, had caught the sound, also, whatever it was, and pricked up his ears and listened.

The Englishman halted and looked wonderingly at the scout, while Maxwell had also drawn rein, catching the pack-horse which had been traveling unled for the last half of the day.

Both the Englishmen understood that the scout had made some discovery.

"I hear hoof-falls," finally explained Buffalo Bill.

"I hear nothing," listening intently.

"Nor do I, sir," echoed the other.

"I distinctly do. There is but one animal and he is coming at a tremendous speed."

The Englishmen looked admiringly at a man who had such astonishing powers that seemed so like a supernatural gift.

The scout was now yet absorbed, as if trying to place the exact direction of the sound.

Over the undulating land he could get an extensive view about him, yet there were depressions—vales as it were—where a horseman might dash along wholly unseen.

"He is coming from yonder direction and must soon dash into view," he at length announced.

"Yes, I hear the hoof-strokes now, Mr. Cody, though faintly. What a sense of hearing you must have."

"Long training, sir, of ear, eye, and other senses, causes us to have almost the instinct of an animal, out here on the frontier," was Buffalo Bill's explanation.

A moment after he said sharply:

"There he comes!"

"But riderless," added Mr. Stinson.

"No, sir; he has a rider—by Heaven! the man is strapped to his back!" cried Buffalo Bill.

"What does it mean?" asked the Englishman excitedly; but the scout did not seem to hear. His whole attention was upon the horse and his bound rider.

There came the animal, rushing full speed, directly toward them. He seemed not to have seen them. Out of the hollow he had dashed, bridleless, saddleless, but not riderless!

He was a mad runaway, with head bent low, eyes glaring, nostrils panting, going at a pace that was terrific on that pathless trail. He came toward the group, as they had

halted; but the scout had moved to one side, directly in the path of the runaway, and now was swinging his lariat as though to catch the mad steed as he sped by.

And the rider?

A rider, yes, but helpless.

A rider bound to the back of the splendid animal.

There he lay, stretched at length upon his back, his head hanging down upon the broad shoulders of the horse, his arms bent backward and bound securely together under the neck of the flying steed, his feet hanging down upon either flank, and there bound together with a rope that prevented the form from slipping off.

It was a horrible, a pitiable sight—one that sent a thrill through the hearts of the two Englishmen.

As for Buffalo Bill, whatever he felt, whatever he thought, his first idea was of rescue.

Was the man alive?

If alive, he might be saved. If dead, the horse must be checked and the poor victim of inhuman hate or savage vengeance be given humane burial.

In his reckless flight the runaway heeded nothing—saw nothing; he was fear-driven.

With head lowered he was rushing straight forward.

But Buffalo Bill had now spurred directly in his path, his lariat ready to throw, while his two companions gazed at him in awe and wonder.

On came the mad steed, with the human victim lashed to his back.

But Buffalo Bill was perfectly calm.

His horse was ready to act, for he well knew just what his master would do.

It would require a most expert hand to throw the lariat-noose over that bent head as the horse fairly flew by.

The Englishmen now watched the scout, not the bounding, terrified animal.

Buffalo Bill, fearing that he would kill the bound rider—if the man, indeed, was not already dead—did he throw the horse hard, had decided upon another plan:

He would hurl the lariat, but at the same moment would spur his horse forward and thus not permit the terrible jerk to come, but gradually to draw the runaway to a halt!

Another moment and the animal was within reach of the rope; then the lasso flew from the skilled hand and powerful arm.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A STARTLING RECOGNITION.

THE coil flew through the air, uncoiling as it did so; and aimed as it had been, unerringly, the outspread noose settled over the bowed head of the runaway, and as it was tightening, Buffalo Bill put spurs to his own horse. The ready animal sprung forward, and though the lariat straightened out taut, it was avoided the sudden and severe jerk which would have thrown the speeding animal heavily to the ground.

Startled the more by the noose, the frenzied steed bounded on at even greater speed; but, the splendid animal ridden by Buffalo Bill was close upon his heels, the lariat was drawn tighter and tighter as they ran, until the leader began to breathe hard, then to sway badly, and his pace slackening with every plunge.

A few more bounds and he was choked to a standstill, when, leaving his own horse to hold him, the scout sprung from his saddle, ran to the animal, knife in hand, and quickly severed the ropes that had lashed the veritable Mazeppa to the back of the steed.

As he placed the form upon the ground, the scout turned and quickly loosened the noose about the neck of the horse, so as not to choke him more.

But, the animal had met his master; his fright was over, and, panting like a hound, he stood wholly subdued.

Seeing this, Buffalo Bill stepped quickly toward the prostrate form upon the ground.

Mr. Stinson and his man had watched the scout's movements with astonishment and admiration.

They had seen the lasso thrown as true as a shot from the scout's revolver would have gone.

They had seen the clever plan of Cody to check the runaway by degrees, not sudden-

ly, and had followed at a gallop as the horses sped on.

Then, as Buffalo Bill approached the form of the victim of man's inhumanity toward his fellow, both Mr. Stinson and Maxwell had sprung from their horses and were ready to lend what aid they could.

"Is he dead?" asked Stinson, as Buffalo Bill bent over the man.

"He is not dead, though unconscious."

"I do not wonder. But, Cody, I have restoratives here, and some excellent brandy."

"Then we will soon bring him around," cheerily assured the scout.

Bathing his face with water from his canteen, Buffalo Bill directed Maxwell to rub the limbs and hands hard to create a circulation.

A little of the brandy was forced into the set mouth, and ere long the body quivered, the muscles began to twitch, and a few moments later the eyes opened.

It was a face upon which the eyes of Buffalo Bill were riveted with a strange expression—a dark, stern, beardless face, and the eyes, as they were disclosed, had a peculiar look in them.

The form, which was athletic, tall, slender, was clad only in trousers and woolen shirt.

He was barefoot, hatless, and there was nothing about him to indicate his calling or aught else.

His hands and feet were swollen from the pressure of the ropes upon them and cut by the friction were his wrists and ankles.

The chest was broad, the shirt open, and on it in India ink were the letters "A. E."

Upon these letters the eyes of Buffalo Bill were riveted with the same strange expression he had when he first beheld the man's face.

As the minutes passed, the scout seemed more and more to be convinced of some fact which had impressed him as he bent over the man, bathing his face with water from his canteen.

The face was terribly flushed, almost blue, from the head hanging down in his horrible ride; but the color began to leave it, ere long, and in a few minutes the intense stare of the eyes had gone.

Still he had as yet uttered no word.

He looked about him in a dazed way, first at the scout, then at one Englishman, then at the other, until his gaze turned back to the face of Buffalo Bill once more.

With a great effort, then, he tried to speak, and said faintly:

"You did not doom me to death—you saved me!"

"Who are you?" asked the scout, in kindly tones.

"My name is Alf Ellis."

"My God! He claims to be the man I killed and saw put in his grave yesterday, at the fort!" cried Buffalo Bill in undisguised astonishment.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DOUBLE OF THE DEAD.

BUFFALO BILL was deeply moved, as he stood gazing upon the face of the rescued man who lay prone upon the ground.

He had heard the reply:

"My name is Alf Ellis."

Alf Ellis?

That was the name of the midnight visitor of the gold miner's camp, who had gone there to rob, feeling that his poison had done its deadly work, and who had been horrified to see the hand of Buffalo Bill thrust through the canvas covering of the wagon, holding a revolver.

It was the name of the one with whom he had fought the duel in the moonlight, had killed, had carried to the fort, even buried along with the other outlaw, and yet had been found bound on the back of the runaway horse!

Upon the breast of Alf Ellis, who had fallen under his fire in the moonlight duel, were the two letters "A. E."

Upon this man's breast were the same two initials!

The faces of the two were apparently the same, and the forms were alike in size and build.

One was the exact counterpart of the other if not the same.

Could it be that Alf Ellis had "played possum"—that the bullet had glanced on the bone, stunning him at first and proving to be only a flesh wound?

The scout had known of just such stances.

Then it flashed upon the mystified mind that he really had not seen Alf placed in his grave.

The body had been wrapped in a blanket, put in a plain box coffin, the grave had been dug, but Buffalo Bill had walked away without the actual burial.

Might not the two men who were buried the bodies of the outlaws have been buried by his own confession, lay the yet living on the ground before him.

The Englishmen watched their guides, the prostrate man. Knowing that one of the men brought dead to the fort bore the name of Ellis, they comprehended Cody's surmise and participated in his wonder.

At last Buffalo Bill again addressed Mazeppa:

"You say that your name is Alf Ellis. So, what is your business?"

"I am a gold-seeker and miner."

"Where do you hail from?"

"The Upper Camps of Gold Dust Valley."

"Did you ever see me before?"

"Not that I remember."

"Have you a double?"

The man was silent.

"Is there another Alf Ellis?" insisted the scout.

"I have heard that I have a double, that he has taken my name."

"Ah! Were you ever in Gold Dust Valley?—the Lower Camps I refer to."

"Never; but I was on my way there when I was captured."

"Ah, yes; you fell into the hands of my foes?"

"My God, yes," and the man shuddered.

"Who were they?"

"I only know that they were four masked men who lassoed me and my horse, stripped me of all I had with me, tied me to the back of my horse, telling me that I was a traitor, and that my doom was death, and then they turned the animal loose, after lashing him severely and frightening him terribly."

"How far he ran I do not know, but I seemed many, many miles to me; for at last I became conscious from the intense pain I suffered."

"But you have saved my life, and I'll never forget you, for I have a rich find in the Upper Camps, and was only going to Lower Gold Dust to see the one who is my double and bears my name."

"God knows I am thankful to you, gentle men, for I owe you my life."

Buffalo Bill heard the story in silence; then he said:

"Go with us to camp to-night, and we can fit you out so that you can return to your mine, for the man you seek as a double is dead. I killed him two nights ago."

"Why he took your name you best know, but he was the image of you, and that is what at first so surprised, so fairly startled me."

"Go back to your mine and keep silent about your adventure, for I think I know the four masked men who made you their victim. They were on foot, were they not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I know the reason for their heartless conduct toward you. But go quietly back to your camp and do not speak of your nearly fatal adventure, for I will find your foes in time and in my own way."

"Will you do this?"

"Could I refuse anything to one to whom I owe what I do to you?" was the earnest response.

"Then we will mount, if you are able, now, and press on to camp."

"I am able, though every bone in my body seems broken, every muscle torn."

CHAPTER XX.

THE TRAIL OF THE UNSEEN RESCUER.

THE party of four reached the camp before sunset, and Buffalo Bill at once made the man he had saved as comfortable as was possible.

Mr. Stinson had extra clothing and shoes which fitted the miner; the scout found a hat among his traps, and when he had had supper Ellis expressed himself as feeling very much better.

wn of just suit Buffalo Bill was worried. If four men had captured Ellis, they must have been the four who had escaped, at the time his rescuer had killed Buck Bradley, and taken to the timber, dismounted. The four were these robber-ruffians, then the shots fired had not injured them. Had they killed the unknown rescuer, was question that now worried the scout. But, the four were not in the locality where they would have been if returning to Gold Dust Valley; but, might they not have been on for the upper camps, to throw suit off their track, and to get there other way, so as not to return on foot, and to disguise inquiry as to the loss of their animals? Had they done so, then they would have been about where they had captured the man whom they had so brutally dispatched on his main race.

Seeing him, they had doubtless supposed he had been playing a deep game. Aid by the scout, in pretending to be dead, he afterward been rigged out by Buffalo Bill sent on his way, though only to fall into their hands.

When quietly riding along, suspecting no danger, Ellis had been suddenly lassoed, had been called by his name by his masked captors, had been denounced as a traitor, and, unheeding his denials of their charges and pleadings for his life, had been robbed tied to his horse and sent off, as his foes supposed, to certain death.

"I will be off on a little trail before dawn," Mr. Stinson, but will get back in a couple of hours or so," announced Buffalo Bill, as they were retiring that night; and the break of day found him across the stream, in the locality where he had heard the shots fired after his unseen rescuer had dashed on in pursuit of the four men.

It did not take Buffalo Bill long, experienced, stripped the trailer that he was, to pick up the trail left by the horse of his mysterious rescuer.

He saw where the animal had passed along, keeping the timber between the camp and his course, and then where he had dashed into a canyon.

Then the scout saw the foot-tracks of the four men in some soft soil for a short distance—tracks which showed that the men were running at their utmost speed.

There, too, the hoof-marks of the horse ended; and more: they turned about!

This the scout saw with delight, for he seemed to read the signs aright—that his rescuer would go no further in the pursuit.

He was too clever to venture into the canyon, where he might be ambushed, so had fired the shots which Cody had heard and sounded the bugle-call again, to make the fugitives believe that troopers from the fort were pressing upon their trail.

The scout followed the trail of the one horse away from the canyon and back into the hills. He tracked him to a distant hill, saw where he had been hitched to a tree, and there were footprints of a man's foot, with spurs, where the rider had sought a point from whence he could view the little camp.

From there he had no doubt watched the scout free himself, harness his horses to the wagon, saddle the riding animals and had seen him drive away.

But why such secrecy? Why had he not revealed himself to the scout? Why had he kept so studiously out of sight?

These questions Cody could not answer, any more than he could as to who his unknown preserver was.

Seeing that the trail led off apparently in a way parallel with his own, when he left the camp, as though to guard him still, Buffalo Bill felt that he had discovered all he then could, for his duty was to go on with the Englishmen to the Gold Dust Valley.

So back to camp he rode, to find breakfast ready, for Maxwell was a ready hand in all work, and the scout was made glad to see that Alf Ellis was able to go on his way, though yet very stiff and sore.

A blanket saddle was made for him, a lariat, and with a bag of provisions, a revolver loaned him by the scout, he again thanked all for the great service rendered him and started alone upon his trail, Buffalo Bill instructing him as to the way.

Then Cody and the Englishmen set out for Gold Dust Valley, riding at a slow pace, for it was decided that it would be best to enter the camps after nightfall.

Riding some distance together, Mr. Stinson finally rode up alongside of Buffalo Bill, for they had been going along in Indian file since leaving camp, and said:

"Mr. Cody, I have seen enough of you, heard enough about you, to feel that you can be thoroughly trusted, and I desire to take you into my confidence as to why I came to this country, and what my purposes are."

"You know best, Mr. Stinson," was the scout's quiet reply.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE STORY OF A CRIME.

THE Englishman seemed lost in thought for a while, after having informed his guide that he intended to reveal a secret, but Buffalo Bill betrayed no anxiety, expressed no curiosity, and rode quietly on.

"I had heard of you, Mr. Cody, before I left England—had read of you a great deal; but I never supposed I would have the honor of meeting you."

The scout bowed.

"I had no idea that I would come to this part of your country, you know; but my business is one to call me the world over."

"It has sent me at short notice into Africa, again to India, to Australia, South America, the West Indies, and Mexico."

"It has several times called me to New York and your large cities, and I have had many a stirring adventure in my travels, suffered many a hardship, and so it is that Max and I are ready to take what comes, for he has invariably been my comrade, my pard, as you call it here. Though in appearance my valet-companion, he is but playing a part for our own reasons."

"The truth is—"

"Pardon me, but see if I can hit the truth. I have decided that you and Maxwell were English detectives, searching for some important criminal."

"By Jove, Cody, you are a mind-reader, for detectives is just what we are."

"In London we write ourselves down as Horace Stinson & Loyd Maxwell, Specials of the Select Service, but when on our travels, chasing crooks, we go as Horace Stinson and valet, off on a tour of the world—see?"

"Yes, sir; and you have dogged one of your crooks to this far-away wilderness?"

"Mr. Cody, we are on a most important and special mission, though following a very cold trail; we are tracking a criminal who has had the start of us for a dozen years."

"It is in this way:

"A couple of years ago a man was thrown from his horse, and the doctor told him his injuries were fatal. He would not believe this, for he was still a young man; was the possessor of enormous wealth which he had inherited; he loved life and the many pleasures that riches could secure, and he called in another physician."

"He, too, told him that he must die."

"Still doubting, he sent for another, and was told the same story."

"The most eminent of the medical fraternity were sent for; consultation after consultation was had; yet all said the man must die."

"He offered thirty thousand pounds to the surgeon who would save his life."

"All in vain."

"Convinced at last that he must die, he made a confession."

"I was one who heard it, and he engaged me to right a wrong."

"He had gained his large fortune by fraud."

"He was but third in the line of inheritance. The true heirs were a little boy and girl, brother and sister, who had been left the large estate by their father, but, in case of their death, the man I spoke of was to inherit it all."

"He was then a young officer in the British Navy, and poor; but the prospect of a fortune turned his head, made him plot to get it, although to do so he must get rid of the children!"

"He came home on leave, plotted, planned,

and at last settled upon his accomplice, the one who should do the work."

"He hit upon a noted London crook, and made terms with him."

"The result was that the naval officer returned to his ship, and, a couple of months after, an attorney wrote to him that he was the heir to the estate."

"The two children, with their nurse, had been rowing in a small boat on the coast where they dwelt; an off-shore wind had blown them out to sea; a storm had come up, and, two days after, the capsized, shattered boat was driven ashore, telling what the fate of the occupants had been."

"No one saw anything but an accident in this; the naval officer got his supposed inheritance and resigned his commission to enjoy it."

"But his death-bed confession showed that he had hired this London crook to rid him of the children."

"He had stipulated that they should not be put to death unless necessary."

"The crook had, therefore, cultivated the nurse; a good-looking fellow, he had won her affections; then he let her into the plot and showed her the sum he was to get."

"He had planned well—for her to row off from the shore with her charges, toward nightfall; he was there in a little craft, with an accomplice, to pick them up."

"They sought shelter in the storm; placed the little boat on the beach to be found; then they sailed for France and took passage to the West Indies."

"From there they went to the United States, and with their ill-gotten money bought a home."

"But the conscience of the woman troubled her, and she told her husband—for he had married her, as he had married others before her—that she intended to confess all."

"That night she died. There is no doubt the man murdered her. He sold out, soon after, and moved elsewhere, taking the children with him."

"Finally he committed a murder and robbery that set the American police upon his track. He fled, it was supposed, from the country, and the children were taken in charge, it was said, by a person who was his accomplice in this last crime. The dying man had lost all trace of him, and of the little heirs he could tell no more, having become too weak for further confession or revelation."

"So it was then that I, and my comrade, Maxwell, were put upon the case, to find the children, and, if possible, their kidnappers; and we have, after the hardest work, tracked the scoundrel to this wild West region, and believe we have placed him in Gold Dust Valley."

CHAPTER XXII.

TRAILING THE CROOK.

BUFFALO BILL listened with deepest attention to the story of crime told by the English detective.

He had read aright that Stinson was an English Select Service officer, come to America for some much-needed criminal, and his astute mind had told him, also, that Maxwell was more of a companion than a servant of Stinson, for he was a most clever and intelligent fellow, brave, and with an iron nerve, as well: evidently a trusty "pard."

When the scout had heard all that Mr. Stinson had to tell, Cody replied:

"Well, sir, this American border is the hiding-place of criminals, crooks and wanted men from all over the world, and you are as likely as not to find the villain you are after right here."

"I know a great many of the denizens of the border, good and bad, and if you give me the name of your man I may thus discover if I have heard of him."

"Certainly, I will give you the names of all concerned, for I have the utmost confidence of your being able to help us, Mr. Cody, on our blind search."

"The children were Darrel and Katherine Burr; the man who robbed them, perhaps sent them to their death, was Sinclair Lynn, their second cousin; the crook abductor bore, in England, the name of Kit Castle, but of course had several aliases, the one he was best known by being 'Liverpool.'"

"The nurse whom he married to carry out his diabolical plot was Lucy Fisher, but in America, as we have ascertained, they were known by the name of the children, Mr. and Mrs. Burr.

"Tracking him closely, as we did, we found that he changed his name several times, and the man we are now looking for in the mines is known as Buck Bradley. At least, that was his last alias."

"Buck Bradley?" repeated the scout, with surprise.

"Yes, do you know such a man?"

"I do not know him, but I have heard of a miner of that name; and the leader of the masked men of whom I told you at breakfast this morning, and who so cleverly captured me, was called Buck, by his pard; and more, he was an Englishman, I am sure, for his accent and looks indicated that."

"And he was one of those buried at the fort the evening before we left?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can it be that we have found our man only to learn of his death?"

"I trust not, Mr. Stinson, but I am simply stating the fact that the man was an Englishman, and that his comrades called him Buck; so it looks as though he might have been the man you have trailed so long and so far."

"It does, indeed; but I shall hope not, for to find the children we must first discover the crook, their kidnapper. We have feared we would have to make terms with the scoundrel to get the information from him by which we could obtain possession of the boy and girl."

"Which would have been the case undoubtedly. We can find out upon reaching Gold Dust Valley, if Buck Bradley was the man who led the masked party upon the trail of Lone Hand Sam, and was killed by my Invisible Rescuer; but, let me tell you, gentlemen, that it is a wild people you are going among. So, to avert suspicion and avoid interference, we must arrange a plan—give a motive for your going there which will permit us a good look over the mines and its people."

"Certainly; we place all in your hands, for you, far better than ourselves, should know best what to do," was the assenting answer.

"Yes, we are in your hands, Mr. Cody," added Loyd Maxwell who had ridden up to the other side of the scout as his companion was telling his story.

It was nearly sunset when Buffalo Bill remarked to his companions:

"The stage trail runs through yonder valley. We will soon turn into it, and then will have a score of miles to go—ah! I hear the rumble of the wheels, now!"

"Yes, it is stage day, and if we quicken our pace we will strike the trail about as it passes."

They did so, and as they neared the trail the rattle of the wheels grew louder.

But, suddenly, when only a short distance from the main trail, Buffalo Bill drew rein and held up his hand in token of caution and silence.

A moment more and a human voice was heard in a sharp command, and the coach came to a quick halt.

What the voice said was:

"Halt, Doc Denning, or say yer prayers!"

"Road-agents," calmly said Buffalo Bill; "we will give the scoundrels a surprise, for they do not suspect help for the coach to be at hand," suggested the scout, smiling as if pleased at the prospect of a bout with the brigands.

"I hain't got a dollar's worth o' value along this trip—only a boy and his traps; so yer'll miss ther boodle this time," spoke up the driver of the coach.

"I guess not! It's the boy we is after, fer if he fooled you he don't fool us. He's got boodle in plenty, an' we is— Oh!"

The sudden exclamation was caused by a shot, and the bandit dropped dead in his tracks.

A perfect yell of fury broke from half a dozen lips, and a voice cried:

"Pards, ther boy hev done fer ther cap'n, and so we hang him right here an' now!"

A shout of approval answered this.

But, there came a second shot, followed by the voice of the driver calling out:

"For God's sake, young pard, don't shoot ag'in, or they'll hang yer sart'in!"

"I can die but once, and I'll die game!" was the plucky assurance, in ringing tones, followed by a defiant:

"Come on, you cut-throats!"

Then Buffalo Bill "chipped in."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DYING OUTLAW.

"I AM going to the rescue of that plucky boy; you stay here."

So said Buffalo Bill, addressing the two English Select Service officers.

He would run the risk for himself, but did not care to have strangers take the chances.

But the Britons were not the men to know that help was wanted and not promptly give it.

"We are with you—lead!" was what Horace Stinson exclaimed; and leaving the pack-horse in the trail, the three horsemen bounded forward at full speed!

So sudden was their coming, so unlooked-for their interference, that the band of road-agents halted in their move upon the coach, where the youth they had threatened to hang then stood, with one foot on the step, fearlessly awaiting their approach!

The outlaws seemed dazed at this sudden interruption, and every one of them stood undecided.

Then they heard the war-cry of Buffalo Bill, as he dashed out into the trail a hundred yards ahead, and the highway gang knew with whom they had to deal.

A volley they immediately fired toward him, and the two men following, but did not wait on the order of their going, for they at once bounded into the timber.

But not until one of their number fell under the fire of the scout, and lay writhing and groaning in dying agonies.

The outlaws were on foot, so had time to leap down the steep hill whence a horse could not follow them, to where they had left their own animals.

They had seen the scout and the two others; the driver, Doc Denning, they knew, was a bad man at bay; the youth had shown what he could do; two of their number had been brought down, and the five who remained had no idea of fighting on equal terms, so they fled with all speed.

"Ho, Doc, in trouble?" cried Buffalo Bill, as he drew rein by the coach and looked up at the handsome driver.

"Oh no; not now, Bill; but we was in a tight place afore you come."

"They wanted my young passenger thar, and if he do look as pretty as a gal, and soft as velvet, he hain't no slouch, for he kilt yon feller, and wounded t'other, ther one you got yer bullet into and is a floppin' round like a chicken with his head off."

"Poor fellow! He is suffering terribly, and I'll see what I can do for him," said Buffalo Bill, as he dismounted and approached the wounded road agent.

"Jist like yer, Bill; would tackle ther Devil with spurs on, if it were a squar' fight, but as kind as a kitten ter a man in distress," the driver remarked.

But Buffalo Bill had already reached the wounded man and said in a kindly tone:

"Come, my man, let me see what I can do for you."

"Nothing, oh, nothing, Bill Cody, for I'm done for—see! ther kid's bullet cut into my neck, and dazed me, and your shot has finished me; but, I'm not blaming you or ther boy, for I brought it on myself, I did, I did," moaned the man.

"I am afraid you did, my poor fellow; but, let me try and relieve your sufferings as much as I can."

"No, let me suffer, for I deserve it; but, it is not the pain the bullets give me, so much as the thought that I must die— Boy, does you forgive me, for I come here with t'others ter hang you up and git yer boodle."

"Yer see, ther chief wanted yer kilt fer some reason, for he knows all about yer and yer game, and told us if we hanged yer we should share ther boodle, and said that yer had a snug pile of it along."

The dying man had turned his eyes upon the youth who had now left the coach and was standing by the side of the scout, gazing down upon the stricken ruffian.

The words turned the eyes of all upon the youth, the two English officers as well as

Buffalo Bill and Doc Denning, for all grouped about the dying outlaw.

Under the gaze of those gathered there, the youth's face did not change or move a cle.

He calmly looked down upon the wretch and asked:

"Who is your chief, whom you say all about me?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

A MYSTERIOUS YOUNG MAN.

WHEN the youth, standing in the pany of Buffalo Bill and his other res put the question to the dying road-agent to who was his chief, whom the brigaded asserted knew about him, the reply came ly:

"I cannot tell."

"Or will not?"

"I will not."

"You are dying."

"I know it."

"Will you die with guilt on your so?" "I will die with enough guilt on m to send it to perdition, but I won't, dying, betray them I has vowed to by one another unto death."

"What harm would telling who your is do?"

"Yer'd run him to his death mighty thet I knows; so I won't betray him vengeance."

"As you please; I do not care; but you said he had expressed such an in in me, I wished to know who he was."

"Still, I can wait, for such a ruffian help but make himself known again."

"Yes, and I'll give yer a warnin' by can afford ter do one good deed before ing:—look out fer him!"

"Thanks; but, as I do not know him can I look out for him?"

"Look out fer every man on this b Yer hain't got no business here, rich is, for yer looks more like a woman t man."

"Yer can guess, I reckons, who had son ter want yer dead, an' so out o' ther and ther man as has his reasons for i down yer in time—mark what I tells y I ca"

"So, git away from this country, loves yer life, boy, for ther chief and with him will fix yer, as I tell yer, fe is a price and I big one on yer life, young feller?"

"Thanks again; but I came out b the mines to stay; I think I shall enjo wild life, and threats will not frighte off."

"But, come! Can I do nothing for Is there no last word you would wish to to those who care for you—no last reme you care to have carried out? I will axw attend to it for you?"

All gazed at the youth with surpr none with more surprise than did the yond outlaw, who said between his groa," w pain:

"Waal, you is a dandy from 'Way, the You'll git along."

"Never mind me, for while I live th hope for me; but, your minutes are nu ed, so say if I can serve you in any w eng"

One long look into the youthful fac was the man said faintly:

"Yes, you can serve me, boy. I've graced my name, my family. I have a far old mother I left in poverty, and I w provide for her in her old age."

"Thar is a price on your head, five sand dollars; ther chief said he would eyes to ther man that kilt yer, only he wante hanged up, and ther sum was to be d ever amongst us."

"Buffalo Bill and ther gents kin tell wants my share of ther money; ther chie know about it and act squar'; he'll send my poor old mother—I has her address was in a old wallet in my inner pants-p Get it out!"

The youth knelt by the man, to obey the outlaw half turned over, as thou aid in getting the wallet, when, with bugh dying energy, he suddenly drew froeapo pocket a derringer pistol, and was th velvet it against the body of the young man! f he

On the instant Buffalo Bill leaped m both feet upon the arm, crushing it b him and snapping the bone, just as the

exploded, the bullet tearing the heel off the scout's boot!

"Curse yer, Buffalo Bill! Yer foiled me mother will starve!" came in a faint and having expended his last dying y, the road-agent's head dropped back, with a few hard-drawn breaths, he was

Well, I have seen many strange death-scenes in my time, but this is the most remarkable. For a man who has broken a er's heart to try and provide for that er by a cruel murder when dying, I never known equaled.

The speaker was Horace Stinson, and his s were echoed by Loyd Maxwell and Denning, while the youth said, in the even tones natural to him:

And from his account, sir, he would have ded for his mother, but for your quick ction of me, twice saving my life within minutes.

I know not how to express my deep ap- tion, sir; but your rescue carries out the s I have heard of you, and I trust we e friends," and then, in a half diffident the youth extended his hand, while Denning said:

as, that is Buffalo Bill, young pard, ther st man that wears buckskin, and that is a heap.

Who you is I doesn't know, fer yer was y booked as a passenger well fixed with lust, and booked ter Gold Dust Valley a lot o' traps, all of which yer would st but fer Buffalo Bill, and yer life along em."

What I am matters not; my name now is Kingdon, and I am going to the mines th profit and pleasure."

There was an emphasis upon the words "name now," which did not fail to be ob- rning by each one present, and in the mind scout as well as of the others, the dar- ung passenger was set down as a very kable and most mysterious individual.

CHAPTER XXV.

ON TO GOLD DUST.

HE man may have a mother in want; dness perhaps he has about him; and, has lost the price that his chief seems ive set upon my head, I will gladly help I can, as I believe my shot would have n fatal had you not fired, sir."

These words of the mysterious youth d Buffalo Bill and the English detec- to gaze with still greater interest upon e they had rescued, while Doc Denning ked:

Waal, ef he don't knock 'em all out, call tenderfoot and I won't fight yer. He jist s me chilly, he's sich a cool kid. Yer out ten on him!"

The youth heard the words of the driver miled, while Horace Stinson whispered will axwell:

Most remarkable people, these Ameri- surp Max."

The wonderful, from the cradle to the groa," was the reply; "men and women,

Way, the mysterious youth: Who was he? e from? Why there?

Buffalo Bill had been trying to fathom o read him, but gave it up; he was, ny we engineers say—the unknown quantity, was evident.

y saw in him a youth of apparently en, and, as Doc Denning had ald in far too pretty for a boy.

His face was perfect in outline, and as ome as a mercury.

He was a blonde, with large, lustrous, dark- eyes, shaded by long lashes of jetty features cut in almost classic mold, even and milk-white, hair of golden wavy and falling upon his shoulders, slender, perfect form, full of activity strength, but not over five feet six in l sendt.

He was dressed in something the style of rt, a black-velvet sack coat, silk neglige gray corduroy riding pants stuck in ome top-boots, and a dove-colored thou hat.

Though there was a belt about his waist, w froeapons were visible, but he had them, s th velvet coat concealing them.

"If he is not a woman in disguise I am leapey mistaken," muttered Buffalo Bill, to it b as the

the Englishmen, both of whom admitted that such was their own opinion.

In an impassive way, as though not at all impressed by the dead, the youth ran his hands about the body of the road-raider, removing a watch and chain, a belt of gold, a finger ring and an old wallet.

This latter he opened and found in it a few time-worn souvenirs—a lock of hair and faded photograph, beneath the latter being written:

"The woman whose fair face and false heart made me what I am."

There was a date of a dozen years before. Then there was another photograph of a handsome youth, and a name and address upon the back, with the words:

"If I am killed, send to Mrs. Della Wilber, Royal Oak, Maryland, and an honest man will send the gold I have on me, also."

"Poor fellow! A woman wrecked his life," said Horace Stinson with a sigh, as though he, too, had "loved and lost," while the youth remarked:

"I will forward all I find on the body to the address here given, after I have written the postmaster of Royal Oak, to learn about the one whose name is given, and if she is in want, I will add to the belt of gold."

"Yer won't tell her what her boy was?" asked Doc Denning with a quiver of emotion in his voice, which suggested that he might also have left a loving one in a happy home, whom he would not care to know what he then was.

"No, indeed! I will never let her think her son was a wicked man," quickly assented the youth.

All seemed pleased at the reply, for it showed a tenderness of heart which shrunk from wounding others.

Doc Denning now reminded them that the sun was near its setting—that ten miles had yet to be gone over to reach Gold Dust Valley Settlement; so the bodies were put into the coach, and Buffalo Bill announced that he and his comrades would ride behind the coach as an escort.

"All right, Pard Bill, and thank yer, for ther trail is gittin' more and more dangerous," said Doc Denning, and then he went on to say:

"Yer see, ther driver that brought ther haudsome kid through ter my station, told me he were well fixed and had a valuable outfit along."

"Them things in ther boot and on top is all his, and Lord knows what they is, and what he's takin' them ter Gold Dust fer, onless it be he's goin' ter keep a hotel."

"Waal, I wanted ter perfect him of course, and so when ther agints held me up, I tried ter play him as only a poor tenderfoot kid; but, Lord love every durned one of us, ef they didn't know more about him than I did; and when they hed their say, he jist made cold meat of ther feller as was in command."

"Why, Pard Cody, he jist like a flash drew his gun and sent a dead-center shot atween the critter's eyes—a shot as you couldn't lay over."

"Now, what is he going ter do in Gold Dust is what holds me down hard. What do you think, scout?"

"Give it up, Doc."

"Who's yer pards, William?"

"Two Englishmen, hoping to strike something to buy in the mines that will pay them big."

"They is plucky fellers, and I'm glad ter see good men going ter ther mines, fer ther roughs an' toughs is gittin' terrible thar."

"But, William, let me thank yer fer chip-pin' in and savin' my freight."

"Don't mention it, Doc; that was right in the line of my duty, you know. But, no more talk, now. We must be going, so pull out and we three will follow. Your young pard is already on the box."

With the bodies of the two outlaws in the coach, Doc Denning started on his way once more, Buffalo Bill with the Englishmen galloping on behind as rear guard, ready for any new emergency.

CHAPTER XXVI.

FORT DEATH.

ALONG the dark and stormy trail the coach rolled, Doc Denning a master of the reins, guiding his six in-hand with marvelous skill,

while his companion on the box seemed to enjoy the night ride greatly.

Doc talked upon various subjects, trying to catch "the kid," as he called the youth—who had given his name as Dare Kingdon—off his guard, so as to learn something about him and to ascertain why he had come to such an out of the way place as Gold Dust Valley.

But, in vain. Not a word did the young fellow utter to reveal anything in reference to his past, or to divulge what had brought him to that wild land, where one such as he seemed sadly out of place.

"Yer'll find Gold Dust a tough camp, pard," Doc informed him, warningly.

"I do not look for a paradise," was the quiet rejoinder.

"That's lucky, fer it 'tain't one; more likely it's a gate to Hades, as ye'll diskiver."

"Has yer friends there?"

"Not one."

"Hain't going ter hang out thar?"

"Yes; I think so."

"Yer will make bad work at mining, I opines."

"Not at my kind of mining, I guess."

"Yer hands is as soft as a gal's, and a pick would blister 'em."

"We cannot expect roses without thorns, sir," was the guarded reply.

Doc sighed, but tried again:

"There's a man kilt thar every day or two."

"Why, from what I had heard, I thought at least a couple were killed every day!"

"Yer don't seem ter scare at that fact."

"Why should I? Every man has a right to live his allotted span, and I must take chances as others do."

"Well, yer has a good man to back yer!"

"You mean Buffalo Bill?"

"In course! He'll do to tie to, every time."

"He appears to be a splendid fellow, and I certainly owe him my life."

"A man just like him I never met before, so handsome, gentle, yet full of nerve and daring."

"But, driver, let me say now I do not look to him for protection or as a backer, as you put it, for I shall go my way alone."

"By the way, what chances are there for good accommodations, in the camps?"

"Well, I don't think they is away up in style. Ther 'Overland' is a tavern kept by Jerry Thomas, who we calls Tom and Jerry, and it has rooms, sich as they be, and beds, sich as they is, but nothin' ter brag on, while ther grub is good, as it goes."

"I wanted to get a cabin to myself, if I could, and if not, then to build one."

"One cabin fer one young feller? No chums, ner pards?"

"For myself alone—no chums, nor pards, nor even friends. I suppose I can get men to build for me, if I pay them well?"

"Oh, yes; Gold Dust is like other places; the spondulix gits what yer want, jest as it does anywhar."

"Then I will select a place to-morrow, apart from the camps, where I can be quite by myself, as I want to be."

"Say, how'd ther old fort suit yer? Yer'd be quite by yerself thar, dead sure."

"The old fort? I don't understand. What about it?"

"Waal, it's a big log house, well up on the hill, a full half a mile from ther stores, tavern or saloon, and no shanties or dug-outs very near."

"Does no one live there?"

"Live there? You bet thar don't!"

"And why not, may I ask?"

"Why, fer the good-enough reason that it's haunted!"

"Nonsense, Denning!"

"No, it hain't nonsense! It's holy fact, and nobody in Gold Dust dares to live there, or even to go thar on a call."

"I will go there!"

"I'll bet yer don't!"

"Name your bet!"

"A even fifty."

"It's a bargain. Now, tell me all about it—this haunted cabin, I mean."

"That's its name—ther Haunted Cabin—though more calls it Fort Death!"

"Fort Death? A queer name, certainly. Why is it so called?"

"Well, little pard, yer see ther Gover'ment built it as a advance post ter perfect miners

when they settled down ther valley some years ago."

"Yes. What then?"

"What then? Why, jest this: One night ther garrison lieutenant and twelve men was all massacred, but whether by Injuns or outlaws, nobody ever know'd."

"And then?"

"After keeping a large force there for six months longer, the post was abandoned, for the miners then was strong enough ter keep ther Injuns at bay. Arter ther sojers left a man tuck it fer a tavern, and fetched his wife out ter help him run it; but it were too far up ther mountain, and ther miners somehow didn't take to it."

"So he gave it up?"

"Had ter."

"Why?"

"Him and his wife was murdered one night."

"Ah! another count against it?"

"You bet! and more still, little pard."

"More still? Tell me the whole story, Denning."

"Well, arter that second massacre, some outlaws made it their retreat. This ther miners found out, and going there one night, hanged ther whole onery outfit."

"Another red score for the old fort, eh?"

"Jest so; and more, too!"

"What, still more red scores?"

"You bet; fer two miners went there to live, and as they didn't tarn up fer a couple of days, a sarch was made and there they was."

"All right?"

"All right? Not much! They was done for!"

"Killed, do you mean?"

"Jest that, little pard. They both had been shot."

"Any more?"

"That's enough, hain't it?"

"Quite enough, I should say. Then the place is unoccupied?"

"Not much it ain't unoccupied!"

"Who lives there now?"

"Ghosts."

"Is that all?"

"Don't you believe in 'em?"

"Not enough to scare me off, for I will go to live at the old fort, if I can get it."

"Oh, you can get it, you bet!" and Doc Denning was more than ever impressed with his young passenger, and voted him the strangest stranger he had ever met.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE ARRIVAL.

GOING over a ridge the coach came in sight of the camp of Gold Dust Valley, and the youth uttered an exclamation of surprise and admiration as the scene burst upon his vision.

There lay the valley, shut in by ranges of mountains upon either side, and with a stream of considerable volume glittering like silver in the moonlight as it wound its way for miles through hills, vales, and meadow land.

Upon either side of the stream were hundreds of lights, from cabins and camp-fires—a group of them a mile up the valley showing where Gold Dust proper was located.

It was a beautiful scene, that quiet-looking valley bathed in the moonlight, with its silvery stream, its many lights; and yet, it was but a slumbering volcano!

It was the abode as Doc Denning, had said, of rough and tough men, many of them fugitives from justice, scores of them boasting that they were "man-killers," cruel as wolves, as merciless as Indians—men striving for their only religion, which was to get gold, fairly if they could and by the foulest means if they could not.

And yet, among that wild horde were many worthy citizens, those who had gone there in search of a fortune for the loved ones at home, and striving for it in honest endeavor.

Adversity had driven others there; still more, upon leaving the army had remained there, greedy for the lucre that has sent many a soul to perdition, and made wreck of many a good name.

And, good and bad, fugitives, honest workers, toughs, desperadoes, outlaws, all were hidden under the calm of that resplendent moonlight night.

That a death-spot, a slumbering Inferno lay beneath the calm was not apparent to the lookers-on from a distance; and the two Englishmen, good travelers as they had been over the earth were as impressed by the splendor of the scene as had been the youth sitting beside the driver.

"Well, little pard it do look pretty from here, and with the moon fer a show-lamp, but whar you see that group o' lights is Gold Dust City, as we calls it, and right thar, this minute, thar is gambling, drinking, swearin', quarrelin' and maybe shootin', and even as we are talkin' some poor devil may be passin' in his chips fer Kingdom Come."

"It may be so; but where is your haunted cabin located, driver?"

"Upon that hill, commanding the full valley-view, just above ther city, as we calls it, half a mile up from it. That's whar. See it, do ye?"

"I see it, and I believe I can make out the fort, as you have named it—Fort Death. It is quite roomy, I should say, as a place to live in."

"Oh, yes; right you ar' on that. The shebang is a big one, with a dozen rooms, or more, a big flat roof, a plaza in the center and one big and one leetle gate ter enter, and a stream of water flows right through it."

"Indeed? Then it ought to be a nice place to live in."

"It's jest a nice place, ef it wasn't haunted."

Following his usual custom, Doc Denning began to stir up his team as he drove down into the valley, and as he reached for his long stage-horn, Dare Kingdon, as he called himself, asked the driver if he could give a few blasts.

"You kin if you kin," was the rather paradoxical rejoinder, and taking the horn from its resting-place, Doc Denning continued:

"My horn is a bugle, yer see, little pard, fer I war a cavalry bugler onc't, and I tuck ter it natural."

The youth took the bugle, looked at it a moment smiling, then placed it to his lips—Doc Denning watching him closely—placed it to his mouth, and at the very first note the delighted rein-puller knew it was in the hands of an expert.

Wildly through the valley, echoing back from the mountain ranges and dizzy heights, rung the clear, beautiful notes, vividly recalling the noble and masterly lyric of Tennyson:

"Blow, bugle, blow! Send the wild echoes flying!"

Buffalo Bill, back in the rear, was quite astonished, and remarked:

"Doc is trying himself to-night, but I had no idea he could play like that."

"He is, indeed, an artist to wind a horn as he does. Why, it is superb!" averred Horace Stinson, who was a fair musician himself, so well appreciated the performance.

"Say when I must stop," Dare Kingdon remarked to Doc.

"Stop?" responded the enraptured ex-cavalry man; "don't you dare do it! Keep it up, little pard, keep it up, fer this valley hain't heerd nothin' like that never! Keep her tootin', pard!"

And Dare Kingdon did "keep her tootin'." He sent forth clear, thrilling notes, each so rounded, full and distinct, that Doc Denning swore afterward he could see them as they went forth!

The unwonted outburst brought from their cabins along the valley trail, every dweller there. What had come over the stage-driver? each one asked. Was he music mad?

On rolled the coach, and loud and long and sweet pealed the bugle-notes, and Doc Denning, wild with delight, lashed the horses into a full run in his enthusiasm.

Undersuch headway the settlement itself was soon reached, and the people seemingly inspired by the bounding and rebounding notes, all made a rush for the Good Luck Hotel.

"Hoopla! Here we is!" shouted Doc Denning, as the steaming teams dashed up to the door and were brought to a stand, and for the first time it was concluded that the tried and true driver was drunk, though known not to be a drinking man.

The bugle had even emptied the saloons, so a great crowd was on hand to receive the coach, expecting something out of the usual run to happen.

"Well, Doc, what have you?" as rail, w lord Jerry, as he came forward to the crowd door.

"Two stiffs inside, a boy bugle question outplay Gabriel, and Buffalo Bill ef he couple o' pards followin' arter therle; but, the reply, as Doc threw his reinse fer, I'd backs of his wheelers and faced them!" sug

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PUT TO THE TEST.

THIS unique introduction by Doc Denning of Dare Kingdon to Landlord Jerry y crowd was well received, for all ew th with a yell. They could bear testi a sma the bugle-playing of the youth. ntain li

But the "stiffs," as Doc called despera dead bodies in the coach also quic manded their curiosity, for such an Gold told the crowd that there had been, let him upon the coach and that two men as a mi killed.

Who were they?

And Buffalo Bill was close at hand killed

What did it all mean?

That was the question which with many, for when an outlaw was ki the ha denizens were immediately interesto take out just who he was, as it general as calle pired that he was one of their own his rec

It often transpired that some unss ques individual was shown to be a black looki

Now, who were the dead men? Dare l

Until this question was settled no wered at ease.

Doc Denning had done his work name, ing the coach safely in, so he would more, and Landlord Jerry had to dw lau bodies out to view.

There was no exclamation of surpy: no one seemed to recognize them.

At last one man said;

"I've seen 'em afore and in thea w mines, so I guess they was out-and-s not which being interpreted meant th clean were regular outlaws who stuck to til by I all the time.

If any one else recognized them th the fact to themselves, but the youth is n don, who was coolly regarding the et and made up his mind that there were yell more than one who knew the dead numbe dared not or cared not to speak, and led F ted down in mind just who these were all v

While the bodies were taken awa well v burial on the morrow, Doc Denning trod the youth personally to La Jerry and asked him to give him the b house afforded, adding that Buffalo B A his two pards would soon be along a sou would also want "the best."

Buffalo Bill had been in Gold Dust, tel number of times before, and several less had had occasion to show that he desrup his title as a man of nerve, by scener wo had occurred there.

He was known and respected—admid F well as feared by the worse element g in camps as well.

Why was he again coming to Gold I ha was the question which went the rounde ar

Who were his two pards, Doc had refru to?

Was he after deserters, or did he pma some one whom word had come fro side East to arrest as a bad man?

Then the interest became so genet D know about the holding up of the coachin Doc Denning was forced to give an acnge of the affair to satisfy the intense curiut, of all.

But where was Buffalo Bill? Why d Yo not put in an appearance, with his two v rades?

This Doc could not answer, and he higt wondered at the delay, as did also W Kingdon.

The latter kept close by the driver, as t a marched within the saloon, as Doc had ber him to do until he got acquainted.

Forced to tell the story of the "hold ted, Doc did it in his own peculiar, quaint str h and bestowed so much praise on Dare Ke don that the youth blushed like a girl.

"Why, he's a dead-to-kill shot, and a got ther narve o'a grizzly, pretty-faced aA be; but they'd hev' downed him ef Bufd Bill hadn't come just in time ter clip in."

"What's he here fer?" asked a voice.

"Who?"

"Buffalo Bill!"

"Ask him and maybe you'll find he

"as a rail," was Doc's sharp reply and forward to the crowd who were not being for" laughed, but the fellow who boy bugle question said:

Buffalo Bill, if he wants me he kin find me arter ther; but, what's the gal-faced boy his reinse fer, I'd like ter know?"

faced them!" suggested Doc. "I will," and he called out in a tone:

sonny, hain't yer off yer trail? fer on by Doc come out here, and I'd like ter tellord Jerry yer comed—so I would."

for all ew the man. bear testi a small fellow, red-faced and strong youth. tain lion, while he had the name of oc called desperate individual to cross in any also quic

such a n Gold Dust City, even the bravest ad been let him severely alone, as a rule.

two men as a miner, a hard worker, had a good and seemed naturally antagonistic, e made it his standing boast that the e at hand killed him should own his all, he even written his will to that effect.

which with this reward to prompt them was ki the hard denizens of the camp seemed interesto take the chances with him.

generals called Red Fred, from his hair as eir own his record.

ome uns question to the youth, all expected a black looking for Doc Denning to resent men? Dare Kingdon waved the driver back tled no wered immediately:

king about men, you are not entitled ame, for you are even smaller than I e would

d to dw laughed, a very few, at this hit at ed's size, but he retorted in his sneer-

of surpy: e don't make ther man, kid, and I yer a question."

in theat was it? I did not mean to be so ut-and-s not to answer."

ant th clean backdown for ther kid, though ck to tll by Doc," some one said aloud.

asked yer why yer come here ter Gold em th"

youth is none of your business," came the y they and emphatic retort from the youth, vere yell of admiration broke from the lips ead number who thus knew that he did not , and led Fred.

he were all waited breathlessly then for what en awswell understood must follow.

ning to La the b

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FALO B AN ACCEPTED CHALLENGE.

along sound of the cheers, following the re-se of the youth, Dare Kingdon, to Red Dust, telling him that it was none of his veralless why he had come to the mines, end-he desruptly, for all wished to see how the scend would take the rebuff from one whom d called a boy.

admid Fred smiled at the reply, instead of nent g into a rage or drawing a gun; but in a lent came his sneering reply:

Gold I have met many a man in my day, and ounds are graves up the valley I have furnis-d refruit for, because folks got too fresh; but ven't got it against me that I ever struck he man or a child, so, young fellow, you can froider yourself in luck."

very eye was upon the youth, as he stood ener: Doc Denning by the door, the latter coaching anxious to chip in to defend the a adnger.

curbut, again Dare Kingdon waved him back, without a change of face replied:

ay d You pretend to be very chivalrous to- two d women and children, calling me a child, ifer, yet you insult me, and expect me to e hit pass unnoticed.

so Why, little red-head, you are only a ward, for nobody but a coward would in-as t an unoffending person, and that person ad perfect stranger to you!"

A yell of fury burst from the lips of Red old led, and his hand dropped upon the revol- t st he so well knew how to quickly draw and e Ke.

"Retract those words, boy or I'll treat you nd a man!" he shouted.

d A breathless silence followed this outburst, Bufd again all eyes were upon the youth.

n. He still leant against the door of the sa- on, calm and fearless, while by his side was oc Denning, anxious to take the fight off s little pard's hands, yet curious to see what he youth would do."

With the same unmoved manner the re-sponse was given:

"I have always had an ambition to be treated as a man, so I refuse to change my opinion of you, and repeat my words that you are a coward and a ruffian, too."

"Hands up, I say, and I'll force an apolo-gy from your lips in my own way."

Red Fred's revolver had sprung to a level now, and covered the youth.

He gazed straight into the muzzle of the revolver and asked:

"Do you order my hands up?"

"Yes, and be quick about it!"

"You mean to kill me?"

"Yes, if you will have it!"

"All right, as you have the drop on me, my little man, I'll raise my hands."

How he did it no one's eyes were quick enough to see.

He did not appear to draw any weapon; none was handed to him by Doc Denning, who still kept his stand by his side but the stranger must have had a gun concealed in his sleeve, for, as his hands went upward, the right stopped only half a second at a level; a sharp report rung out, and Red Fred went down.

It was a derringer that did it—a weapon not five inches long, ivory handled, gold mounted and with the barrel painted flesh color.

The bullet it carried would have killed a buffalo bull, as it did Red Fred, who could not have known what hit him.

His own weapon exploded as the finger convulsively touched the trigger, but the bullet passed over Dare Kingdon's head and buried itself in the door frame above him.

A dead silence followed the two shots.

Men did not seem to know just what had happened.

Doc Denning had not fired, and it could hardly be realized that the young stranger had done so.

But, there he stood, no weapon visible, as he quietly kept his position, his face unmoved.

After a quarter of a minute of time it seemed to dawn upon the crowd that Red Fred lay dead, with a bullet in his brain, and the stranger whom he had called a boy, whom he had covered with his revolver, had done the shooting.

The first to realize it was a friend of the dead man, as huge in stature as the other had been diminutive, and as ferocious as a wild-cat.

An all-round bad man, he was known as Bitter Creek Bob, and the sworn friend of Red Fred, for whom he worked.

"That kid did not fire that shot—who did, for I tackled him," shouted the giant, towering above the crowd a full head.

But, Dare Kingdon seemed neither im-pressed by the threat, nor the size of the man, and said in a light way:

"Say, giant, it was I who killed the little red-head, but don't force me to fill a grave-yard the first night of my arrival in your peaceful valley."

The stock of Dare Kingdon went above par, at once.

Doc Denning had not over-estimated him, and the good men of the place were begin-ning to feel that the youth was being crowd-ed too far; so Doc decided to chip in, when Bitter Creek Bob shouted out:

"I'll lick you, young feller, and then tackle any o' yer friends who dares to face me."

"I'm his friend; take me first!"

All startled at the calmly uttered words, and Buffalo Bill strode through the door, the two Englishmen right behind him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE GIANT OF GOLD DUST VALLEY.

BUFFALO BILL had arrived in Gold Dust Valley.

No one could doubt it who saw his splen-did form and handsome face suddenly ap-pear in the saloon known as Jerry's Joy, and which was, though a joy to Jerry, the scene of more misery to others, and more tragedies, than any other spot in Gold Dust Valley.

Why he had not come in right behind the stage no one could say.

Doc Denning had announced that he would so put in an appearance but Buffalo

Bill had not known that Doc intended to speak of his coming at all, and so he had lagged on the way for reasons of his own, wishing to make a perfectly quiet and un-observed entrance into the place.

He did so, with his two English compan-ions, to discover trouble brewing for the brave youth whom he had already so be-friended.

So the pack was sent to the room assigned to the three, the horses taken around to the stable in the rear, and the two awaited in-side, admiring the pluck of the boy but all ready to chip in if it became necessary for the fair stranger's safety.

They saw him lay out Red Fred, and the scout whispered:

"I never saw anything better done. The boy is a chief!"

Then came the giant, Bitter Creek Bob, and the scout thought matters had gone quite far enough.

He saw that Doc Denning and others meant to interfere, but that would mean the lives of perhaps half a dozen, and he, as a Government officer, might check the affair right there and prevent further bloodshed.

Cody knew very well, that, in that wild community, he would be taking the whole responsibility upon himself, for what might follow, but that was just the reason why he did "chance it."

The scout knew all about Red Fred and his big pard, who was often called "Red Fred's Giant," while the small man, had been called "Bitter Creek Bob's Boy."

As to the giant, Buffalo Bill had heard of his wonderful feats of strength, that he was catlike in his movements, in spite of his great size, and that he preferred to kill a man by brute force, or strength, rather than by the use of a weapon.

The Hercules had been known to kill men by a single blow of his fist, to break a man's back by a kick, to wring his neck, and by other acts that proved his amazing strength.

But, a stranger to fear, Cody entertained no dread of any man, though he avoided trouble, sought no man's life, and only used force or weapons when he deemed right, jus-tice and necessity all on his side.

So it was that he strode out of Jerry's Joy Saloon and threw down the gauntlet to Bitter Creek Bob:

"I am his friend; take me first!"

And Bitter Creek Bob knew Buffalo Bill!

He was aware that he was chief of scouts in the army for that military district; and well deserved the name he had won.

The fact that Cody was an officer of the Government, and that Bob was dodging the law, handicapped the giant, and therefore he would gladly have sneaked away if that was possible; but that he could not do; he could not "show the white feather" and remain in Gold Dust Valley.

His pard was now dead, so he had addition-al good reasons for remaining, hoping to re-tain possession of the mine of the dead man, his friend.

So he made a bold stand to the scout's challenge:

"You is Buffalo Bill?"

"So called."

"Yer don't hang out in Gold Dust Val-ley?"

"I go where I am ordered, or where duty calls."

"What right has yer ter chip in now?"

"I thought it about time when I saw a great over-grown bully trying to find an ex-cuse for killing a brave youth who is a stran-ger here, and I am surprised that all others here are not of my opinion as to this dastard insult."

"Well, what does yer ask of me?"

"Nothing. I want peace here, and so de-mand that you let that youth alone."

"Suppose I won't?"

"Then you have me to deal with, for I will protect him against any and all assault, inter-ference or insult!"

"Dear Mr. Cody, let me settle it, and do not implicate yourself, for you have already done so much for me," and Dare Kingdon stepped to Buffalo Bill's side as he spoke.

"No, Kingdon, young man, you are a stranger here, and though you have showed your grit and ability in facing this coward's pard, this bully must drop his pretended quarrel with you, here and now."

"See here, Buffalo Bill, as you has taken

up ther boy's quarrel, I says right now I'm glad to tackle a man o' your big name, so let it be revolver, bowie knife, or a stand-up fight—say which," and Bitter Creek Bob loomed up to his full height and proportions.

Would he intimidate the boy's champion? Would the challenge prove too much for the scout?

We shall see.

CHAPTER XXX.

PREPARING FOR THE FRAY.

"I AM not a bar-room fighter, nor a man-killer; nor do I seek trouble, Bitter Creek Bob, for I have just been told your name and warned against you; but I know Wild Western usage, so will accept your challenge," was the army scout's emphatic response.

"I have stepped in to prevent your further abuse of this stranger youth, and to do that will meet you on your own terms."

Every word uttered by Buffalo Bill was distinctly heard by the entire crowd, and at the words a smile that was malignancy and triumph commingled crossed the face of the huge borderman-ruffian.

"Well, we'll make it man to man without weapons," announced the desperado, "an' it shall be ter kill who can."

"I do not wish to kill you; I desire no life upon my hands that can be spared; but all the same I accept your terms," was the reply of Buffalo Bill.

Again that look of triumph and malice swept over the face of the bully, while something like a chorus of groans came from the best men in the crowd, who looked upon the scout as doomed.

There were others in that crowd who understood that Bitter Creek Bob had feared to meet Buffalo Bill with either revolver, knife or rifle, so had wished to match his strength against the scout's, knowing that Bob's mighty prowess, which had never been overcome, would be sure to rid the camp of any further interference by the man the bad element so dreaded.

So the two elements, good and bad, awaited with breathless interest what was to come.

As the arrangements were begun for the meeting, Dare Kingdon stepped forward and said:

"I insist, Mr. Cody, that this must not be, for I alone am the one to meet that big brute. It is my right!"

"Pardon me, but you are a stranger here. You have done all that is necessary to prove your pluck, for you promptly and properly killed the ruffian who began the quarrel, and so ended the career of one who long has been a terror in these camps."

"His pard has seen fit to take up this unequal and unjustifiable quarrel and I shall see that he is satisfied."

"But the coward's brute strength must be enormous," urged Dare.

"I have heard that a tiger can whip an elephant," was the scout's smiling reply.

As the youth realized that he could do nothing, he quietly stepped back to where Horace Stinson, Maxwell and Doc Denning were standing together.

"Can this not be prevented?" he asked the driver.

"Just what I am anxious to know," Horace Stinson added, in evident excitement and anxiety.

"No! it's got to go on," replied Doc Denning. "Bill has got to face the music now."

"But that fellow will surely crush Cody," Maxwell urged. "He will kill him, for look at his bulk, at his enormous hand, his reach of arms and how active he is."

"I has known of many men who has expected ter kill Bill Cody, ter wipe him out, ter mop the earth up with him, and yet he seems ter be in right comfortable health jist now, though I does wish it had been a case o' guns instead of a clutch atween 'em."

"Yer see, gents, fer some reason Red Fred picked onter ther boy here, and he got his sleepin' portion. Then Bitter Creek Bob tuk it up; and though I didn't say nothin', I were layin' fer him, as many more was, if he'd made a break, but Buffalo Bill jest sails in and thet puts ther trouble all onter him, and it's my opinion ef he hes got inter a picnic whar he can't enjoy hlmself, it's the fu'st one."

This explanation of Doc Denning made the two Englishmen and the youth feel a little easier in mind, though they could not just see how the scout was to win save by a clever trick of some kind.

In the mean time all gambling in the saloon had ceased, and the tables were moved to one side, the body of Red Fred having been placed upon one, his hands folded upon his breast, one of the miners calling out:

"Say, Bitter Creek Bob, Red Fred's waitin' fer yer across ther Great Divide."

"Durn yer, I'll see to you after I has give Buffalo Bill a lesson thet will make him mind his own business in future," growled the desperado, and the man who had spoken was sorry he had said anything to attract attention to himself.

To Doc Denning Buffalo Bill handed his weapons, threw aside his coat, tightened his belt, and wound his long hair up in a knot to be out of his way.

Bitter Creek Bob had also cast aside his coat, hat and belt of arms, and called out:

"Now, Buffalo Bill, say yer prayers, fer my clutch is death if I once git it on a man."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BATTLE.

THE threatening words of Bitter Creek Bob seemed to impress the crowd far more than they did Buffalo Bill.

That the big tough had his admirers there was proven by the cheer which followed from not a few in the crowd, those who, though afraid of the bully, were yet inimical to Buffalo Bill as the representative of law and order.

"I would give much if this fight could be declared off, much as I like a fair stand-up argument of man against man," said Horace Stinson.

"Yes, for there seems to me not the shadow of a chance for the scout," Loyd Maxwell returned.

"Yet, somehow, I do not believe my hero will be downed, my idol shattered; but I am going to see fair play if I have to chip in myself, as they say out here," Dare Kingdon remarked, in his quiet but determined way.

"Yes, that will be fair play, fer thar is men here ter act, though they is lyin' low now."

"If things don't go right, ter-morrow will be a holiday fer plantin' ther dead," Doc Denning averred.

Then a silence fell upon the assemblage, for now the two combatants were ready for the fight.

It was to be a rush, a feinting attack, a knock down, a grapple, just as the men could make it, after Landlord Jerry, the referee, gave the word.

The two men faced each other across the room, forty feet apart.

It was a dirt floor, but as hard as a rock from long tramping upon.

The lights were not over bright, but sufficiently so for all to be plainly seen.

The crowd had formed a solid circle around the open space, but Doc Denning who knew, saw that the chaff and wheat had separated as though by mutual consent, and the latter loomed up in the majority, which caused the driver to mutter to Stinson:

"They expect Buffalo Bill ter be kilt, and knows ther army will come mighty sudden outer ther valley, so many wants ter be on ther safe side."

"Are you ready, gentlemen?" called out Landlord Jerry.

"I'm allus ready," growled the bully, while Buffalo Bill replied simply:

"I am."

"Ready!" shouted Landlord Jerry, and all expected to see the adversaries rush at each other.

They were mistaken.

Bitter Creek Bob made a feint to do so, but Buffalo Bill did not meet it.

So they stood regarding each other, the scout looking his huge antagonist coolly over.

Whether he knew it or not, or so intended it, his cool look of defiance slightly disconcerted the Hercules, for his fingers twitched nervously and he seemed impatient.

Thus they stood for half a minute, and

the miner began to get decidedly uncomfortable. He did not like the scout's tactics, did not understand them.

Then, to the surprise of all, instead of standing on the defensive, Buffalo Bill kept his eye upon his antagonist and advanced to the attack.

This evidently disconcerted his enemy more, for he glanced about him uncertainly, then, by a sudden impulse he made a dash forward, uttering a wild cry which he should intimidate.

But, Buffalo Bill did not flinch, and as the huge bully's fists were about to strike, the scout was seen to suddenly drop down, and forward, and then rising quickly, as the blows of Bitter Creek Bob missed their aim, rose with the legs grasped in his arms, and then his enemy with terrific force backward, whole length upon the hard ground.

From his head to his heels Bitter Creek Bob struck the ground, with a force that knocked the breath completely out of his body and stunned him almost into unconsciousness.

Cody stood gazing down upon him, arms folded, his whole attitude that of a gladiator in calm, triumphant repose.

The silence was like death, for at first the crowd did not comprehend it; it could hardly be realized just how it was done.

The scout's apparent fall, his grip of the bully, his sudden rise and the dash of his huge form upon the hard ground had been so quick, and so skillfully done, with such display of strength that it fairly dazed onlookers, both for and against him.

The Englishmen were first to appreciate the character of the act, and broke forth a cheer that was taken up by others under the roof fairly rattled.

"Time!" shouted Stinson.

"He'll never come to time," yelled Maxwell.

"He's dead!" came in a chorus of many voices.

"You've killed him, Bill," shouted Dare Denning.

"No; he is only stunned," and Buffalo Bill leant over and felt the heart-beats of the prostrate man, adding:

"He'll soon come round. Stand back a give him air, for he will wish to renew the fight."

A boisterous laugh followed these words of the scout, and some one called out:

"No, he will not! A hundred to fifty will not fight any more!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

A SHOT FROM THE DARKNESS.

ALL eyes turned upon the bold fellow who had offered to wager that all the fight would be knocked out of Bitter Creek Bob.

To the surprise of every one it was Dare Kingdon.

There he stood waiting, a wad of bills in his hand.

He quickly found a taker in a miner friend of Bitter Creek Bob, who said:

"The bet is Bob won't fight when he comes round?"

"Yes."

"Want any more at them odds, young fellow?" asked another miner, who was known to gamble on anything.

"Yes; put up your money in Doc Denning's hands."

"Take another?"

"Yes."

"And another?"

"Yes; all you will. Two to one the bully backs down when he recovers consciousness," cried Dare Kingdon, and as Doc Denning took the stakes put up, he muttered to Horace Stinson:

"I guesses thet young pilgrim hain't no gal arter all. Nobody but a real sport would go it so on bettin'."

A dozen wagers were thus made, the youth standing to lose a thousand or win half that sum before the prostrate miner showed signs of returning consciousness.

Then he began to breathe heavily; his muscles twitched; a red stream trickled from his mouth, where his teeth had cut his lips, and soon his eyes opened.

At first there was no apprehension or understanding of what had happened; the man's wits were still in the mist.

decidedly a Landlord Jerry waved the crowd away, shed a drink of whisky between his lips, shed a glass of water into the pallid face, stepped back, leaving Buffalo Bill quiet-standing alone awaiting the movements of his antagonist.

At last the eyes glanced about upon the faces of the crowd; a shudder ran through the giant form, and the gaze was fixed upon Buffalo Bill.

"Can I aid you to rise, Bob?" asked Cody. The man, with an effort, sat up, refusing the proffered aid.

Seeing the blood staining his shirt he asked ruffly:

"Did yer shoot me?"

"Oh, no; there was no shooting."

"Nor knife me?"

"No; I am not of your stripe, for I see you have a knife sticking out of your hip-pocket here."

"Lordy! I didn't know I had it!"

A yell of derision greeted these words, and the miner bully saw that the majority of the onlookers were against him.

"Do you intend to resume the fight, Bob?" asked Landlord Jerry.

"Is I hurt?"

"You are the best judge of that. You look as if you had struck a sawmill."

"I feels all broke up; that's a fact. How did he do it?"

"You met your match, that's all," chip-lashed in Dare Kingdon.

The bully glared at the boy, but made no reply, and again Landlord Jerry asked:

"Is it a back down, Bob?"

"No; but I hain't able ter fight now, fer I admits he downed me. Some other time I'll—"

"No, the fight ends right here if you are not going to fight now. It is a fight now or not at all."

"I tell yer, pards, I feel as ef every bone in my body was broke. I ain't able to go in again."

"All right; I will not fight a crippled man," and Buffalo Bill turned upon his feet, while again the roof of the saloon rattled with the cheers given.

But there were hisses and groans, too, and many black looks were cast toward the scout, while a few of the friends of the fallen giant aided him to rise and assisted him to his cabin.

"He's hurt a leetle, I don't doubt; but he's playin' possum, too. Ther fight are knocked out of him this time, but you can bet he intends ter renew it when he holds a winnin' hand. So look sharp, Pard Bill," remarked Doc Denning, warningly.

"This is your money, young man," and Landlord Jerry, as referee, turned over the stakes to Dare Kingdon, who remarked in his indifferent way:

"Thanks; keep it for me, please, until I need it," then turning to Buffalo Bill he continued:

"That was most cleverly done, sir; but with all his brute strength you are the stronger man, and I never saw a finer exhibition of physical power and good management."

"Nor did I, Mr. Cody, and I have witnessed many exhibitions," added Stinson, while Loyd Maxwell had to say:

"It was simply grand—wonderful! You have muscles of steel, Mr. Cody."

"You bet, Pard Bill, I had an idee yer'd down him, fer I knowed yer," chimed in Doc Denning.

Before the scout could reply there came a shot just outside of a window of the saloon, and a man fell heavily against the sill, his rifle discharging in the air as he did so.

"That man was aiming to kill you, Buffalo Bill, but somebody shot him and saved you," cried Landlord Jerry, rushing back into the saloon.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AN INVISIBLE RESCUER.

Who was it that had fired the shot, the aim of which had been foiled by some one who had killed the intended assassin of Buffalo Bill, was the first question asked by many.

Then came also, at once, the query as to who had saved the scout's life by shooting his would-be slayer.

The first question was answered very quickly when the dead man was dragged into the light of the saloon, and all recognized him as the devoted friend of Red Fred and Bitter Creek Bob!

He was a camp idler, working when he pleased, gambling and generally an all-round bad man.

He had been loud in his denunciation of the youth for killing Red Fred, and in the scenes which had followed, between Dare Kingdon and afterward with Buffalo Bill, and Bitter Creek Bob, Curley, as he was called, had been very urgent that the crowd should teach the strangers a lesson.

When Bitter Creek Bob had been so completely worsted, Curley had been seen whispering to him earnestly, and then had left the saloon.

Knowing the surroundings perfectly, he had slipped around to the rear of the large and rambling cabin, in the darkness, to fire a shot, and then dart off through the timber and escape before any one could pursue.

Thus the scoundrel went to do; but some one had suspected his intention, and proceeding to the rear of the cabin had literally caught him in the act, but, before the ruffian could take aim, the scout was saved by a quick and fatal shot.

Curley had leaped almost into the window in the death-spring he gave, but the one who had thus preserved Buffalo Bill did not make himself known.

That the scout was to have been the victim, not one who saw the would-be assassin doubted, for upon every lip were the words:

"Curley was the friend of Red Fred and Bitter Creek Bob, and meant to avenge them."

In vain were questions asked, and search made to discover who was the rescuer of Buffalo Bill. No one could or would tell, if he knew, and thus it was made evident that the slayer of the ruffian preferred to remain unknown.

Going into the hotel—so called from courtesy only—Buffalo Bill, the two Englishmen and Doc Denning found Dare Kingdon in earnest conversation with Landlord Jerry, who called out as they came up:

"I say Doc, what do you think this game youngster wants to do?"

"I don't know, but he'll do it if he wants ter, you bet!"

"Why, he says he has come here to live for some time—"

"If I do not get killed, you know, landlord."

"Yes, if he don't get killed, he'll live here, and he wants me to fit him out comfortable in the old Haunted Fort."

"Yes, I wish two bedrooms, one for a guest when I have one to drop in on me, the other for myself; and a kitchen and sitting-room and places for horses, which you must put up in good shape for me, landlord; and so with what I get from you, and the traps I brought with me, I can be quite comfortable."

"Yes, if the spooks let you alone, for I tell you frankly, young fellow, though I don't believe in ghosts, I would not pass a night in that place for a fortune."

"Me, too," joined in Doc Denning, "and there isn't a man in these camps dare say I'm a coward; but I draws ther line at what I don't und rstand."

"Why, there is not a miner in the camps who would stay there now," declared Landlord Jerry.

"Well, not being a miner, I will; so tomorrow I'll go there; and, gentlemen, come to see me when you feel so inclined."

"You're a dandy," was Doc Denning's comment, while Landlord Jerry remarked:

"Seeing as you say you are not a miner, what is your game, young pard?"

"I will tell you, for I have no reason for hiding it."

"I am a gambler."

Buffalo Bill gave a whistle that expressed his surprise; the Englishmen looked amazed, the landlord seemed to scarcely believe his ears, while Doc Denning said:

"Well, I'll be durned ef you hain't a trump, young feller, and I'm pleased ter know yer."

"If yer play keerds as yer shoot yer'll git rich, right here."

"Well, I always play a fair game; I like

the excitement of gambling, and I took a fancy to come out here to go in for big money, to see real life in the Wild West and to enjoy myself," was the response of the youth, in the off-hand manner that seemed natural to him rather than assumed.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AFTER THE BATTLE.

THE morning dawned in Gold Dust City, to find the happenings of the night past more than an ordinary affair to talk over.

The attack on the stage and killing of two men, the arrival of the strange youth and his plucky stand from the start, with the coming of Buffalo Bill and the Englishmen, the death of Red Fred, and Bitter Creek Bob's downfall, with the invisible person who fired the shot that had saved the scout, gave the miners of Gold Dust City much to think about and discuss.

The dead men were to be buried at the expense of Dare Kingdon was the statement given out early, by Landlord Jerry, who had ridden off with the youth and Doc Denning, while the rest of the camps slept later, after the exciting happenings of the night.

The three had gone to the old fort, and Dare Kingdon had noted its strength, been much pleased with its position, and said at once that he would make it his home.

So, Landlord Jerry was told to fit him up there as snugly as possible and as quickly, the youth intending to remain at the hotel until all was ready for him.

Returning to the Good Luck, they found Buffalo Bill and the Englishmen up, and all had breakfast together, after which the youth looked at some horses which the landlord had for sale and purchased three of the best animals that there were in the camps.

Then the young stranger unpacked from his traps a handsome faro-table and wheel of fortune, the like of which Gold Dust City had never dreamed of before, with dice and boxes, and all the implements of the professional gambler.

Landlord Jerry had been more than willing to give him a place in his saloon, but Dare Kingdon told him that he would open a room in his quarters on the hill, and would run his gambling games but three hours, three nights a week, allowing no drinking there, so that his opposition would not injure Jerry's Joy to any alarming extent.

In fact, the landlord and the strange youth seemed to at once become most excellent pards, and Buffalo Bill was glad to feel that the youth would have two such good friends as Jerry and Doc would prove to be.

As for himself, he set the youth down as a mystery he could not understand.

Who was he? What was he? Why had he come to the mines? Certainly he was a most remarkable personage to come to that wild and lawless settlement.

But, the scout set about making what discoveries he could in regard to Lone Hand Sam.

He was most cautious in all he said and did, not even giving away to Landlord Jerry and Doc Denning his reasons for wishing to ascertain.

One thing impressed him more than it did others, that being the question as to who his invisible rescuer was.

He was vividly reminded of that other rescue he had met with, when at Lone Hand Sam's camp.

Was the one who shot Curley, and had saved him once before, one and the same?

At least the same secrecy had been maintained regarding the identity of the rescuer, and the scout very naturally was anxious to get at the bottom facts.

The dead were buried with honors, the miners always making a display at a funeral, and the scout, the Englishmen, and Dare Kingdon were especially invited to attend—an invitation they accepted, though Buffalo Bill feared the result would only be more funerals.

But, as Doc said, the affair "passed off in great shape," and without trouble, though many regretted that Bitter Creek Bob was not there to see his pards Red Fred and Curley "planted."

Bob sent excuses, as he was still "feeling bad"—which, however, he did not explain

as to whether he meant mentally or physically.

When the burials were over, Landlord Jerry put in the claim for Dare Kingdon as Red Fred's heir, according to the will of the latter, written and left in the hands of the landlord—which was to the effect that the one who took his life was to be his heir.

The general opinion was that the youth had earned the legacy, and in taking possession he at once expressed the determination to give the amount of gold saved up, on hand, to those who were destitute in the camps, and springing upon his horse he boldly rode to the mine to interview Bitter Creek Bob.

The big bruiser looked in an ugly mood, and did not know just how to take the visit, but Dare Kingdon at once said:

"You were the pard and workman of Red Fred, if not his sharing partner, Bitter Creek Bob, and I'm not one to hold a grudge, for our trouble is over, so remain where you are and work the mine on half-shares with me."

Bitter Creek Bob was taken aback; he did not understand that kind of a nature; but he was only too glad to do as told, and when Dare Kingdon left, the bruiser avowed that he was his friend for life.

But from the low-muttered words of the youth it would seem he could read human nature, for, as he mounted his horse, he said to himself:

"Treacherous as a snake; I must watch him."

CHAPTER XXXV.

PICKING UP POINTERS.

DARE KINGDON took possession of his gruesome quarters, in the ill-omened old cabin that had served as a fort.

There was elegant water there, fine grazing-ground for his horses, and ample accommodations to make him comfortable.

Landlord Jerry had "fixed him up" in great style; the faro-table and wheel had been set up, with another table to be used for throwing dice or playing cards.

All this being done, the young gambler gave it out that he would open his games within a week or ten days.

Much curiosity was felt regarding the strange youth, but he had already created a wholesome respect for himself, so the roughs and toughs of the camps were not curious to rudeness.

Then, too, his generosity with Red Fred's legacy, and his treatment of the giant, Bitter Creek Bob, stood greatly in his favor.

Remaining quietly at the Good Luck, Buffalo Bill had, meanwhile, done more quiet detective work, having discovered that Lone Hand Sam, the gold-digger, was supposed to have gone on the East-bound trail all right.

Doc Denning had reported that he had not seen him, but the stock-traders at the stage stations had reported that a wagon had gone along the trail, at night.

Which was all that was known about the miner, as far as outward appearances went.

But, Buffalo Bill was well aware there were men in Gold Dust City who knew that the miner had been killed, but for reasons best known to themselves they kept quiet about it.

Making inquiries he learned that Buck Bradley had been one of the Ten of Diamonds, but had left the mines very suddenly.

Nor was this all, for it was said that the leader of the Ten of Diamonds had also left, and his name was Alf Ellis.

Whatever the miners thought about the two leaving, the Ten of Diamonds kept the secret to themselves; but, somehow it leaked out that Alf Ellis and Buck Bradley had skipped together, after having robbed their comrades.

Buffalo Bill knew, however, that this was not the case.

He was aware that the Ten of Diamonds wished to hide the death of their comrades by allowing this belief to get out.

But, to the surprise of all the Ten of Diamonds still kept their number intact, for two new members stepped into the places of the missing ones.

Dick Drew stepped in, also, as chief of the "Diamond Ten" as the band was sometimes called.

Making these discoveries, Buffalo Bill talk-

ed the matter over with the two English officers. The conclusion reached was that Buck Bradley was the man they had been on the trail of, but they had only reached the place to find him dead, killed by Buffalo Bill's Invisible Rescuer almost at the moment of their arrival.

With Buck Bradley dead, the long and sinuous trail came to an end, and his lips sealed, they could not find the children for whom they were looking.

They must therefore return East and commence again at the point where they had started off on Bradley's trail, only they must go on another tack, try another plan to trace the lost heirs.

Not yet utterly discouraged, they expressed their determination to start back to Fort Advance whenever Buffalo Bill was ready to go.

The scout, still anxious to carry on his investigations in Gold Dust City to discover all he could about Lone Hand Sam, yet conceded that his duty was to the Englishmen, and he was, therefore, determined to guide them in safety back to the fort; but again securing leave from Colonel May, he would return to prosecute his search, for he believed that, in unearthing the secret of the dead miner, he would be able to make some important discoveries about the man, his hidden treasure and who were his heirs.

Incidentally he would endeavor to find out more regarding Buck Bradley, whom the Englishmen were assured was "Liverpool," the kidnapper of the lost heirs to the great English estate.

Having decided to start upon their return, the next morning, the scout and the Englishmen went up to say good-by to the strange youth.

He received them most cordially, expressed deep regret at their going, told Buffalo Bill he would always be glad to welcome him when he visited Gold Dust City, and mentioned that he had written East to see if the address found on the dead road-agent was that of his mother, intending to send her the money left by her wicked, out-cast son, and more with it, if she was in want.

"That boy is more of a mystery to me the more I see him, and, strange as it may seem, I still believe he is a woman!" averred Buffalo Bill to the English officers, as the three made their way back to the Good Luck Hotel.

The next morning, before dawn, the three rode away from Gold Dust City, and, to the surprise of all, Buffalo Bill was not brought to bay by Bitter Creek Bob or his friends, as it was surely expected would be the case.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE MYSTERIOUS UNSEEN.

THE day did not dawn until Buffalo Bill and the two detective officers were well out of the camps; then there was a halt for breakfast at a good water and grass camping-place.

Having finished their breakfast, they sat down for a smoke and chat—the officers, while not discouraged by their set-back in finding Buck Bradley dead, regretted that they now must do so much of their work over again.

"It may be that I can find out something more about Buck Bradley. The man may have left papers, or have had a pard who was in his confidence, and the moment I get any information which I think valuable to you, I will write you," Buffalo Bill had remarked.

"Do so, and offer any sum in reason to induce any such pard of his to talk," urged Stinson.

"Yes, by all means, Mr. Cody, for if any one can give us information or a new lead, we will drop the trail we are on and take that up, or divide and follow both," Loyd Maxwell supplemented.

"You see, I dared not ask much about Buck Bradley when we were there, as I did not wish it known that Lone Hand Sam had been killed; but, both Landlord Jerry and Doc Denning will try to see what they can find out for me about him—Ah!"

The scout sprang to his feet, the two officers following his example, as there was heard a distant shout, and suddenly, on a cliff a couple of hundred yards away, a man was seen to leap to his feet, rifle in hand, totter forward and fall into the little valley,

half a hundred feet below, and wherein the three men were then encamped!

In falling he dropped into a lot of bushes which broke his fall, and the scout hastened toward the spot, calling to the two detectives to keep a watch upon the surrounding cliffs, and have their rifles ready for quick use.

Arriving at the base of the cliff, Buffalo Bill picked up the rifle which had fallen from above, drew the form from the bushes and found that the man was dead.

Without delay he bore it back to the little camp, and placed it upon the ground, the face upturned.

The face was scratched with the bushes, but in the center of the throat was a bullet wound.

It had been a fatal shot, even had the man not fallen over the cliff.

"One of the miners from Gold Dust City," remarked the scout, remembering to have seen him there.

"Yes the very man I saw talking so earnestly to Bitter Creek Bob last night, and which I told you of," remarked Loyd Maxwell.

"Could he have shot himself by accident and fallen from the cliff?" Stinson asked.

"Oh, no; he came there to lie in ambush for our coming."

"You think so, Mr. Cody?"

"I am sure of it."

"And shot himself by accident?"

"Oh no."

"There was a shot, for you see the wound."

"Yes, but it was no accident; some one shot him."

"But why?"

"Well, the way I read the signs are that he came here to lay in ambush purposely to kill me."

"Some one, perhaps, whom my Invisible Rescuer, knew was coming and shot him before he could draw bead on me, for there was no motive why he should kill either of you gentlemen."

"I believe you are right, as you always are; but, where is this Invisible Rescuer now?"

"I give it up, Mr. Stinson; but I shall climb to yonder cliff and investigate."

With this the scout made his way up to the cliff, and the two detectives saw him standing there.

While he was gone they made a search of the body, which was clad in the usual rough garments of the miner, and equipped with the usual belt of arms. In the pocket of the hunting-shirt they found a slip of paper, that was all.

In half an hour the scout returned riding a horse.

"Here is his horse, which I found over the ridge. He had evidently been lying in wait upon the cliff for several hours."

"But, I learned nothing else, except that the shot which killed him came from across the canyon, from yonder higher cliff; but it would take half a day to reach that point, and then, perhaps, find no trail, for my rescuer, if he fired to save me, as seems evident, is doubtless now far away."

"Well, we have searched the body and found on it this slip of paper. Read it."

The scout took the paper handed him by Horace Stinson and read:

"I don't want to be seen talking to you any more to-night, so will slip this in your hand."

"They go, sure, in the morning, so head them off at Pleasant Camp, and lie in ambush on the left cliff."

"Kill B. B. as he passes along. The two tenderfeet can never catch, or trail you, if you are careful."

"Kill B. B. and the money promised is yours, but leave the camps to-night, and get back, with all speed, to work."

"You Know."

"Yes, and I'll know, too, for this writing will betray the writer," averred Buffalo Bill quietly, while Stinson replied:

"Yes; but your Invisible Rescuer still remains unknown."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A STRANGE GRAVE.

STILL wishing to keep as much secrecy as possible with his movements, Buffalo Bill determined to tie the body of his intended

assassin upon his horse and carry it along until it could be disposed of at some spot where the grave could not be found.

He knew full well that he was marked for death, by the outlaws from whom he had been rescued by his unknown protector, and that his future path would be beset with dangers, yet the unflinching scout he was determined to carry out his intention, and said to the English detectives:

"Whoever are my foes they cannot frighten me off, for I shall return to Gold Dust Valley and play a lone hand in ferreting out the scoundrels on my track and carrying on work I have set out to do."

"But, you must work with utmost caution, Cody, for it is now evident that there is a devilish plot to put you out of the way."

"Yes, Mr. Stinson; but, one must fight the Devil with fire out here, and long practice and experience have taught me to know pretty well how to take care of myself."

"Yet, yours is but a life, Mr. Cody, and a well-aimed bullet can wipe it out in a flash," reminded Maxwell.

"True; but I must take the chances, and do you know I have no thought that I will die with my boots on, as they say out here, for I really believe I have a long life before me, and this belief helps me in my greatest danger, I assure you."

"Well, you have our best wishes," replied Mr. Stinson, and the party rode on in silence, until, at last, Buffalo Bill observed:

"It is at yonder creek we will bury the body of my intended assassin."

"You intend to throw it into the stream there?"

"No, to bury it, and you will be witnesses as to the arranged assassination, the mysterious rescue shot from some one unseen, and the style of man this one was, for his body can never be dug up if needed to appear in testimony."

"As for myself, I have my own report to the colonel and this slip of paper."

"Yes, but how will we bury the body, as we have only our knives?"

"I will soon show you, for we will need neither pick nor spade, and yet bury him beyond the power of all human hands to resurrect him."

The words of their guide mystified the two detectives, and they confessed to themselves that the more they saw of the wild borderland and its people, the more they were amazed and bewildered.

Arriving at the stream, it proved to be a swiftly-flowing, fairly-deep sheet of water, winding its circuitous way amid mountains, valleys and canyons.

There was a bed of sand and gravel, high banks here and there, with meadowlands just at the crossing, and some trees, inviting to a camp.

To this spot the scout led the way and dismounting, at once staked out the horses.

Then he took the body of the dead miner in his arms and led his companions toward the stream.

It was wide, just where he halted, with sandy bottom on either side, over which the main current sent a ripple that merely kept it moist.

"Take hold of this lariat end, for I may need your aid," said the scout.

Both did so, and to their surprise the scout tied the other end about his own body, close up under his arms.

Then he took the body of the dead man, wrapped it in a blanket, after folding the hands upon the breast, and thus bound it securely.

The two officers watched his movements with the deepest attention, meanwhile.

Having completed his arrangements, Buffalo Bill raised the blanketed form in his arms, and, to the surprise of the two men watching him, ran suddenly out upon the moist sands as fast as he could proceed.

They saw his feet sink beneath him, rapidly as he ran—beheld him halt, lay the body face upward upon the sands, and spring backward.

But, rapid as had been his movements—brief as had been his halt to place the body in a recumbent position, his feet had already sunk out of sight in the treacherous sands, and, but for his throwing himself backward, full length, the feet would have clung there,

held fast in the merciless grip of the quicksands.

"Pull hard!" he called out, and the Englishmen dragged him along on the soft sands to safety.

Once on hard ground again, he sprung to his feet.

"Now look at the body sinking into its last resting-place!" he cried, pointing to the blanketed form lying upon the quicksands, but slowly disappearing from view.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE SILENT WITNESS.

THE two English officers stood watching with interest akin to awe, the disappearing of the outlaw's blanketed form in its strange grave, the treacherous quicksand of a western stream.

To them it was a strange and novel sight, never having before seen a quicksand.

They had been made aware of its great danger, from the manner in which the scout had been almost drawn into its deadly grasp.

Then they could understand the precaution of Buffalo Bill in fastening the lariat about his body and giving the other end into their keeping.

Gradually, as they gazed, the blanket-wrapped form sunk lower and lower. Lying flat upon the moist sands, it seemed swiftly drawn downward until, at last, it disappeared wholly from sight.

The body had been buried, as the scout had said, without pick or spade!

"Marvelous!" exclaimed Horace Stinson. "Another wonder to set down to the credit of this wonderland," Maxwell added.

"These quicksands are common in many of our western streams, and have cost the lives of many who did not suspect their danger; but, to an experienced eye the sands are known at a glance," explained the scout.

But, while the two detective officers stood there, wrapt in wonder and interest, the eyes of the scout had been scrutinizing the surroundings and had made a most important discovery—one however which he did not reveal for some time.

Then he said, in a low tone:

"Don't appear to look, but cast your eyes on the bank across the stream, and you will see half a dozen dark objects that appear to be stones."

"I see them, and they are stones."

"No, Mr. Stinson; they are not stones."

"They certainly look it."

"Yes, Mr. Maxwell, but give no sign that you have noticed them."

"What are they?"

"Silent witnesses of the burial of the dead miner."

"I confess I do not understand."

"They are Indians, Mr. Stinson."

"Indians?" echoed both men.

"Show no surprise or excitement—no indication of having seen them; but they are Indians, for I saw them move into their position."

"Continue to gaze upon the quicksand for a while, and I will take observations."

This was done—the scout, however, showing no sign of watching the objects.

At last he said:

"Now let us return to camp, but still do not appear to notice the silent watchers."

"You will go back, then?"

"Apparently; but we are in no immediate danger, so we will have dinner, smoke our pipes, and then mount and ride upon the back trail for half a mile."

"You certainly take danger most coolly, Mr. Cody."

"I am used to it."

"You still insist upon calling those objects Indians—Why, they are not three—only one."

"Yes, the others disappeared while our backs were turned in coming to camp."

"You were right, then?"

"Oh yes; they have left one brave to watch us, while the others are consulting."

"With the intention of attacking us?"

"Yes, they think so. This trail crosses the stream and enters yonder canyon, you notice?"

"Yes."

"That is the trail they expect us to take."

"I see."

"So they expect to ambush us and get our scalps."

"I counted seven of them, but there are more, perhaps fully half a hundred. They are a scouting party. They saw us before we did them, saw us bury a body in the quicksands, and expect us to keep right on to the fort."

"Now we will quietly get dinner, eat it, and—"

"I fear my appetite is spoiled," said Stinson.

"I'm not so hungry as I was," rejoined Maxwell.

The scout laughed lightly, and continued: "We will have our smoke, then will mount our horses, but, instead of crossing the stream, we will take the back trail."

"That move will surprise the redskins, who will make haste to get their ponies and follow, but we will have a good start."

"Half a mile back on the trail we can turn abruptly to the left, then ride down the stream for half a dozen miles and come to another crossing, when we will have the Indians behind us, instead of being between us and the fort as they now are."

"If it comes to a chase, why, we can make a running fight of it, and that is better than an ambush, any time."

"I should say so," observed Stinson; "and with that dead-shot Winchester of yours, the running fight will be dead reckoning for the pursuers."

"That is just what it will have to be, I reckon," added the scout complacently.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A FLYING FIGHT.

UNDER the guidance of the cool and experienced border pilot, the two Englishmen showed no excitement, but calmly aided in preparing dinner.

They saw that the one Indian, looking like a rock, was still on guard watching them with basilisk eyes, but they were both utterly fearless men and did enjoy their dinner in spite of the assertion that they had lost their appetites.

This duty and pleasure over, the horses were gathered, the load of the pack-animal was shared with the animal of the dead miner, and mounting, they started back on the trail, the way they had come.

"Watch in a minute and see how that red-skin has disappeared, for he will hasten away to warn his comrades that we are not going to ride into their trap, but have turned back, having apparently only gone to the creek to bury the body in the quicksand," said Buffalo Bill.

Within the next minute they all glanced backward, and discovered, surely enough, that the red spy had disappeared.

"Now we will ride for it," announced the scout, as they reached the deer trail running down the river bank, and back half a mile from the stream.

They rode rapidly, Buffalo Bill on the advance, the two English officers following, each leading a horse, leaving the scout free for action.

After a gallop of several miles the country became more level and they approached the river by a plain.

Upon the other side of the stream the bank was steep and high, but there was a break in it through which the trail led.

Reaching the water the horses were given ample time to drink, and upon crossing and reaching the highlands beyond, the scout halted for a rest, at a point that gave them a view far back over the trail they had come.

As they looked, a score of Indians were seen dashing across a valley, hot in pursuit.

"Well, Mr. Cody, you were certainly right; but we have a good lead of them."

"Yes, Mr. Stinson, we are all right if—"

"If what?" asked Maxwell as the scout paused.

"Well, I see only about twenty redskins yonder; there should be more; if so, they remained on this side of the river, and may have been sent down to head us off, when it was discovered, by the direction we took, and by our rapid riding, that we must have seen them, or suspected danger."

"Now the trail on this side is double the length of the one on the other bank, owing to the canyons; and if they are trying to head us off, they will come out about a mile

from here, so we must take no chances, but ride for it."

This they did, and the spot where the trail down the bank crossed the one they were following, was just at the edge of a bit of timber seamed by small canyons.

"I half believed it; there they are! It is a running fight now," and Buffalo Bill pointed through the timber to where a long line of mounted braves were visible.

The three white men were discovered at about the same time, and, with wild yells, some two scores of redskins were dashing forward to head them off, for with a deep canyon on their left, if the braves reached the crossing of the trails first, the white men would have been cut off and caught between the two bands.

The scout's practiced eye, however, told him that they would pass the crossing fully two hundred yards ahead of the leading warriors, and he told his companions so, at the same time adding:

"There will be a flying fight there; but I will see if I cannot cut that big chief out of his saddle when the time comes," and he pointed to a large brave in gorgeous war-bonnet and mounted upon a fine spotted pony.

As the horses were put to their full speed, the gantlet was run in safety, with a fair margin to spare, and the two officers gave a yell of triumph, along with the scout's war-cry.

The trail was now plainly visible before them, and, as bullets and arrows whizzed toward them, the latter falling short, but the bullets whistling uncomfortably about their ears, Buffalo Bill called out:

"Ride right on, while I have a try at Spot ty!"

He halted, leaped to the ground, threw his Winchester across his saddle, took quick aim, and pulled trigger.

Instantly the gorgeously-bedecked chief was seen to wave his hands wildly in the air, to reel in his saddle, and then to bend forward and rest upon his pony's neck.

On dashed the splendid spotted animal, and, amid the yells of rage from the coming red horsemen, was heard the scout's wild war-cry as he dashed suddenly toward the animal with the chief still upon his back, for he had been caught some way in his saddle though apparently dead.

The detectives had halted at the scout's action, and opened fire with their rifles upon the Indians, but they saw Buffalo Bill dash alongside the spotted pony, tear the war-bonnet from the chief's head, hurl the body from the saddle, and, grasping the rein of the horse, come flying along after them!

As he overtook them, they beheld that the Indians were wild with rage over the scout's daring act, and from there on it became a running fight, Buffalo Bill's long-range repeating rifle keeping them from crowding them too closely.

CHAPTER XL.

ON SEPARATE TRAILS.

FOR miles, and up to dusk, did the Indians press on in pursuit of the three whites, for the death of their chief and capture of his war-bonnet and pony by Buffalo Bill, rendered them desperate with rage.

"When night comes we can dodge them," said the scout, who had kept the detectives leading with the three led horses, while he slackened his speed from time to time to give the Indians a few shots from his long-range repeater.

When night at length came on, Buffalo Bill began to show his strategy as an Indian-fighter.

He halted the party at a good spot to make a stand, and the three men opened from ambush, as it were, emptying their rifles.

This at once checked the pursuit, the redskins thinking that the pale-faces had made a stand, as their horses had probably broken down; so they prepared to dismount and surround their enemy's position.

Instead of halting, however, for any length of time, Buffalo Bill led the way once more, their horses in a walk, until at a distance beyond the hearing of hoof-strokes; then they pushed on once more at a rapid pace.

"They will take an hour to surround our

halting place, rush in upon it, find we are gone and then, doubtless, give up the chase.

"If not, they will not overtake us, for there is a trail ahead where we will turn off, and we can hide for the night, for our poor horses need the rest."

This plan was carried out. The camping-place the scout sought was reached, the tired horses were unsaddled and staked out, and their riders had a cold supper, not daring to build a fire.

Telling the detectives to seek rest while he watched for awhile, the scout did not waken them until dawn, when they reproached him for not permitting them to stand guard while he slept the latter part of the night.

"Oh I'm used to it, and do not mind a couple of nights.

"But, now, we will push on a few miles, then halt for breakfast, and after that push on to the fort, where we will have dinner."

And they did so, seeing no more of the Indians.

A troop of cavalry, led by one of Buffalo Bill's best guides and scouts, were sent out in chase of the reds, to return the next day, and report a hot fight with them and with heavy loss to the braves and some casualties to the command.

"The redskins were so enraged at the loss of their chief, they had pushed on near to the fort, where we found them; but they are in full retreat now, a hundred in number," was the report of the commander of the troop.

To Colonel Mayo the detectives had told their story in confidence, and expressed their intention of returning East to make another effort to find out there what had become of the children they were seeking.

The colonel listened with the deepest attention to their story, and was informed how the death of Buck Bradley had thwarted their plans seemingly in the very moment of their success. He asked:

"Are you sure that this man Bradley was the one you are in search of, and the kidnaper of the children, gentlemen?"

"Yes, sir; there is no doubt of that, for we tracked him up to his coming West without a missing link in the chain of proof against him; but when we gave up another clue as to the children, we came here as the most direct way to find them by finding him; but he being dead we must take up the other clue, now. Mr. Cody has promised to find out in Gold Dust Valley if Bradley had a confidant in the mines to whom he may have told what he did with the heirs he kidnapped."

"Well, if anything is to be found out, Cody will do it for you, and I will grant him leave to return to Gold Dust City and learn all that he can. I wish him also to see what he can discover about that mysterious miner, Lone Hand Sam, for there are heirs also who must have the fortune he had hidden away before his untimely end," said the colonel.

And so it was that the detectives started by stage back over their trail to begin anew, while Buffalo Bill, after a couple of days at the fort, set out alone for Gold Dust Valley, armed with full authority by Colonel Mayo to hunt down the masked men who had followed Buck Bradley's lead upon the trail of Lone Hand Sam.

CHAPTER XLI.

A STARTLING REPORT TO THE DIAMOND TEN.

AFTER the departure of Buffalo Bill and the English detectives, Gold Dust City settled down to its normal condition again, gold-digging, gambling and carousing, with the almost daily deadly affray.

The arrival of the strangers had been a break in the regular order of things, in that the several leaders of trouble had been the ones to suffer, instead, as was more often the case, the lesser lights were made the victims of the bullies.

Red Fred, Bitter Creek Bob, Curley, all had been brought down—Bob from his pinnacle of big bully, the other two to lose their lives.

Alf Ellis, a man-killer, had mysteriously disappeared; Buck Bradley, another man to be greatly feared when aroused, was missing; but the general opinion was that the two had robbed their comrades of the Ten of Diamonds and skipped the camp with their booty.

But, the Ten of Diamonds still retained their number, and Dick Drew, the acknowl-

edged leader, was a man to be dreaded even more than Alf Ellis had been, though, to his credit be it said, he was not one to go around looking for trouble.

The reader will recall the meeting of the Ten of Diamonds the night that Lone Hand Sam bade farewell to Gold Dust City, when, in the absence of the chief, Alf Ellis, Dick Drew the lieutenant had taken it upon himself to send a force after the departing gold-miner.

This act alone would stamp the "Diamond Ten" as a band of outlaws, though they were not generally suspected of being such, in fact, all of them were popular as individuals and as an organization in the camps for protection.

But, the sending of the five men, Buck Bradley being their leader, proved disastrous in the extreme.

In the first place they found Buffalo Bill in possession of the gold-miner's treasure, and Lone Hand Sam dead.

Next, they discovered that their chief, whom they had never suspected of treachery, was a traitor, for there was his dead body in the gold miners' camp killed by Buffalo Bill, and a dead witness of his own treachery to his comrades, having planned to get the treasure by poisoning the coffee of Lone Hand Sam and then, by following, to take possession and leave.

The five of the Diamond Ten, however, had their greatest troubles begin there, for they believed that the scout had hidden the miner's gold, and, while seeking revenge upon him, Buck Bradley had dropped dead, shot by an invisible rescuer of Buffalo Bill, while the four who escaped were on foot and flying for their lives.

One by one they had sneaked into their camps; a meeting of the survivors of the Diamond Ten Club had been called, and eight responded to the summons.

Dick Drew presided, and Wild Walter told, in a suppressed but earnest tone, of the adventures they had gone through.

The story of their chief's treachery fell heavily upon all. The eight men looked suspiciously at each other to know whom to trust.

Dick Drew asked:

"Do you believe the chief intended to skip with the gold for himself?"

"There was every proof that he did," was Wild Walter's response.

"And Buffalo Bill got the treasure?"

"He did."

"That means that we will have it yet, for he will carry it to the fort."

"Yes, sir,"

"You believed what the scout told you of the chief's treachery?"

"Oh yes; it was true."

"So I believe."

"But we did not let on that he was our chief, for that would have given us away, here."

"You are right, Wild Walter; but who killed Buck Bradley?"

"The soldiers, or the scout guiding them, for we heard the shot, Buck fell dead, then came the bugle-call and we footed it as fast as we could."

"The timber was thick, so we saw no one except one man, the scout of the party I think, and we crossed the stream and hid in the hills."

"Some shots were fired in the canyon, but not at us, or only to frighten us, and we kept going."

"And then?"

"We decided to make for the Upper Camps to get horses there and come here, and now I've got to tell what you and none of them that did not see him will believe."

"Out with it, Wild Walter!"

"Well, we were going along our way to the Upper Camps, tired out and hungry, and we saw a horseman coming."

"We laid for him, caught him with our lariats, and, who do you think he was?"

No one could guess, and Wild Walter continued:

"It was the chief, and we then knew he had not been killed—that he was playing a game with Buffalo Bill, who had let him go free, giving him a splendid horse and a good outfit."

"That means that he and Buffalo Bill went in together on the gold?"

"Yes, but he didn't get any of it, for we had our revenge, as we took all that had been given him by the scout, tied him to his horse and set the animal free, after frightening him half to death."

"Yes, we are avenged on the chief," added Wild Walter, firmly.

CHAPTER XLII.

SINNERS ON THE ANXIOUS SEAT.

WILD WALTER's story fell like a bomb-shell in the cabin where the Diamond Ten were assembled.

At first Dick Drew and the others could not believe the story to be true, of Alf Ellis's supposed death, his playing possum so well, the rescue of the scout, and afterward their meeting the treacherous chief all rigged out and well mounted, not twenty-four hours after leaving him, as they had supposed, dead in the camp of Lone Hand Sam.

"Well, Wild Walter, I cannot blame you and your comrades for the revenge you sought upon our traitor chief; but, do you suppose he is dead?" asked Dick Drew.

"No doubt of it, for the horse was crazed with fear, and we tied the chief in a way that he could not last long."

"Did he beg for his life?"

"Well, he denied that he was Alf Ellis, but that did not go with us."

"You think the horse ran himself to death?"

"No doubt of it, or went over some cliff."

"Well, as I am second in command, I now become chief, and in the place of Buck Bradley, I appoint you, Wild Walter, as next to me."

A cheer greeted this announcement, and Dick Drew went on to say:

"Now the charm of our Ten of Diamonds must not be broken, so we will take in two men to make the number complete again."

"I know two who will be acceptable to all here, I am sure—they are Lem Sykes and Dud Nichols."

"What do you say?"

The men named were readily accepted, and Wild Walter was sent to summon them.

In half an hour they came, and were only too anxious to join the Diamond Ten, so they were at once admitted into the band, subscribing to the iron-clad oath that bound them together.

This done, Dick Drew, now the chief, brought up the official organization business before them, as it was the night of a regular meeting, and then came the words of the new chief:

"Now, men, there is work before us, after the property left by the chief and Buck Bradley have been settled, and all of which goes to the band, and that is to know just why Buffalo Bill and those two Englishmen have come to Gold Dust Valley."

"They are Englishmen, and their dress and appearance indicate that they have not been long in this country, and, coming with Buffalo Bill as they do, I believe they are here for other reasons than they state—to buy interests in paying mines."

"It is your duty, then, each and all of you, to keep your eyes upon their movements and report all they do, say, and where they go."

"I mean Buffalo Bill as well as the Englishmen."

"Nor is this all: there came in with them, last night, or on the coach ahead of them, a youth. Their meeting the coach on the trail was no accident, as they assert. They saved the coach from robbery, and I have reason to know that the band who held up Doc Denning did so to get possession of that youth."

"He may look like a girl; may even be a woman in disguise, may call himself a boy; but boy or woman, I feel certain that he is an officer of the law, a detective, playing a game to remain here in the mines and pick as he finds them, certain fugitive lawbreakers."

"His being here at the same time that Buffalo Bill is, and the two Englishmen, proves to me that there is a plot to make certain arrests, and hangings will follow."

"You see, now, why you must keep your eyes open, watching Buffalo Bill, the Englishmen and the boy, girl, man or woman, whatever he may call himself, but who is, in reality, a detective—mark my words on that point!"

The words of the new chief were marked, for the men had really more confidence in Dick Drew than they had ever felt in Alf Ellis.

All decided at once that he must be right, and as any one of them might be the man who was wanted by the youth, if detective he was, they vowed to become shadowers upon the new-comers and to thwart them.

But the next day they discovered that Buffalo Bill and the Englishmen had left during the night, and the youth, remaining alone, had established himself in the old fort as a gambler.

Was this only a clever trick to catch crooks?

The guilty ones of Gold Dust feared so.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE SUNDAY SPORT.

DAYS had gone by since the coming into Gold Dust City of the youth known as Dare Kingdon.

He had made his advent as a hero, for Doc Denning had told of his remarkable heroism in the hold-up of the coach by the outlaws.

He had kept up his record for nerve when he had met Red Fred and had killed him, and if his dead shots at the outlaws had been looked upon as good fortune, the way he had brought the dangerous little miner down was known to have been cleverness, unerring aim, nerve, and no accident.

Just how he would behave with Doc Denning off on the coach trail and Buffalo Bill gone from Gold Dust, was a cause of speculation.

He certainly had shown a fearless nature in taking possession of the old haunted fort as his quarters, and to dwell there alone.

He had shown nerve in his bets that Bitter Creek Bob would not dare again face Buffalo Bill, and had offered his bets freely at odds and won.

He had then demonstrated his generosity in giving away the legacy of Red Fred, which he had won by the terms of the will, and then had exhibited a spirit of forgiveness in keeping Bitter Creek Bob to work the mine on half-shares.

He spent his money freely in fitting himself up, had asked the price of nothing that he cared to purchase, but paid for it without a word, and had given out that he was a gambler—that he intended, upon three nights of the week, to run a faro-bank wheel of fortune and general gambling den, allowing no drinking, smoking or profanity in his saloon.

If miners wished to come there on those terms, they were welcome; if not, he would see that they stayed away.

"Waal, he's going ter run a Sunday-school gambling temperance saloon, and only them as has been baptized kin play keerds thar," was the comment of an old miner, while another called out:

"Yas, that's jist it, and we'll call him ther Boy Saint."

"Or ther Gambler Deacon."

"No, call him Pious Willie."

"Thet don't go; make it Saint Peter's Kid."

And thus names were shouted out for the youth, all bringing a more or less hearty laugh until Dick Drew added:

"Pards, I want you all to step up at my expense and drink to the health of the Sunday Sport."

"The Sunday Sport goes!"

"I second the motion."

"That fits him."

"You bet it does!"

And, with a wild cheer, the health of the "Sunday Sport" was drunk, and hardly had the glasses been tipped, when a clear voice cried:

"At my expense, gentlemen, drink again, for I accept your name!"

It was the Sunday Sport himself.

There was a yell; the glasses were filled up again, and calling for a couple of boxes of cigars the youth himself passed them all around the crowd, and then, with a wave of his hand, went out of the door.

"Did you see that he looked straight in the face of each man here, as he handed a cigar to him?" whispered Dick Drew, to Wild Walter.

"I saw it."

That night Landlord Jerry entered his saloon and tapped for order.

Doc Denning had come in with his coach an hour before and was with him.

All knew Landlord Jerry's call for "order" and obeyed it.

He was liked, respected and obeyed, as a general thing, for his influence was felt.

"Gentlemen, a word with you, please."

Every glass was set down, every card-player waited.

"You all know my young friend, Dare Kingdon, whom you have christened the Sunday Sport?"

"Well, he has taken possession of the old fort, and two nights from this opens a gambling saloon there, and calls it his Hall of Fortune."

"In his name, now, I invite you all to visit him on his opening night."

"His hours are from sunset to midnight; his rules are a square game and liberal returns if you have luck, with no drinking or profanity."

"Fightin' ruled out, too?" asked a voice.

"Oh, no; if there is real cause given to draw a gun do so—he'll keep his reckord up on that, I guess, if I know anything about him."

"As for gambling, you can get all you want there, but if you go there for trouble my advice is for the one so inclined to stay away."

"Now, gentlemen, you are invited by the Sunday Sport to drink at his expense, so you see he don't go against liquor; only he does not allow it in his ranch."

"Come up all!"

They came up with a will, and then and there all said they would attend the opening of the Sunday Sport's saloon.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A STARTLING METAMORPHOSIS.

THE evening of the opening of the "Fort Saloon" came and found the camps a scene of excitement.

All Gold Dust City had decided to go.

For some reason which they themselves could not understand, some of the miners dressed up for the occasion—that is as far as Wild Western toilets were concerned.

A light shone brightly at the gate of the fort, and, as the sun had gone down, the miners began to wend their way up the hill, which had several times been saturated with the life-blood of redskins who had attacked the post.

They drew near the gruesome place with its stories of ill-omen and its weird romance, all anxious to see just what the "opening" meant, and all ready with the cash to test their luck in the new saloon's games.

The young gambler had been just ten days in the mines, and was known to every man there, for, if not at the Good Luck Tavern, or Jerry's Joy, he was daily seen on horseback riding about the trails.

So far he had had no visitors at his home, save Landlord Jerry, and now that individual, accompanied by Doc Denning, were the first to go up the hill to the fort.

Reaching the door, it was found to be open, and the voice of the youth called out from within:

"Make yourselves at home, gentlemen, and receive the guests for me. I will soon be with you."

The large assembly-room of the fort had been made the gambling saloon, and it was well-lighted.

At one end, just by a door, was a platform on which was a table whereon stood the wheel of fortune.

To the right of this was the faro table, and about the room were scattered small stands for card-playing, dice-throwing, and other games of chance.

It was a gambling den, pure and simple.

A notice upon the wall read as follows:

"RULES."

"Order must be preserved, but all differences when life or honor is at stake can be settled by a fair stand-up fight."

"No drinking allowed, and a drunkard will be fired."

"No smoking allowed, for it clouds the air to such an extent that a good shot could not see the sights on his revolver."

"No profanity allowed, for it is degrading and blasphemous."

"All games at the tables of cards, dice-throwing, etc., pay five per cent. per game commission to the house.

"The faro table and wheel of fortune will keep bets running against all players.

"Gentlemen will abide by the rules of this house, and other than gentlemen, will not be tolerated here.

"By order of
"THE QUEEN OF FORTUNE."

As the men filed in Landlord Jerry and Doc Denning welcomed them, and showed them seats.

Those who had expected to be boisterous assumed a quiet mien, though why they could not tell.

Some had "loaded up" to go there, yet the place had a more subduing effect upon them than the liquor had an exhilarating one and they subsided.

There were seats for all save for a few late comers, for no one yet had ascended the platform, where there was one large chair near the faro table and wheel of fortune.

Still the young gambler did not appear, and Landlord Jerry called out, as Master of Ceremonies:

"Gents, read the rules while waiting, those of you who can read, and those who can't better get 'em told to 'em."

This turned every gaze upon the "Rules," written in large, legible letters, and according to their ability to do so, men were reading what was to be their guidance in the new gambling saloon.

There were growls from some, sneers from others, a laugh now and then, a general murmuring; then the hum grew louder and louder until the din became almost violent, and several present, already armed with flasks of liquor, drew them out for use, while the snapping of matches showed that many had decided to load their pipes and have a smoke.

Landlord Jerry looked uneasy; Doc Denning broke the rules by swearing at the crowd, and a general chorus went up for the:

"Boy Sport to show himself, and see how his rules were regarded."

Suddenly the door behind the platform was opened and a form appeared.

In an instant every eye was riveted upon that form, every voice was as hushed as though the Angel of Death had appeared in their midst; every eye stared at the picture framed in the doorway; pipes were put out at the expense of burned fingers, flasks were shoved deep into inner pockets, and men but sat there and looked, and looked, amid a dead silence.

Was it the Boy Gambler?

Yes.

But no longer in male attire! No longer the handsome, reckless youth! But a beautiful girl, robed as a queen.

The metamorphosis was a most startling one to that rough crowd!

CHAPTER XLV.

THE QUEEN "AT HOME."

THE question that had been upon many lips was answered:

"Who is the Queen of Fortune?"

So had the "Rules" been signed.

Now the answer was before them.

The boy had disappeared; a young girl, and a beautiful one, too, had appeared!

There was the boy's face, only softened by the feminine attire.

There was his slender, elegant form, rounded out by graceful feminine garb.

It must be the boy, for two persons could not be so alike.

The boy, then, must really be a girl.

As Dare Kingdon he had been playing a part; but what a bold part for a girl!—what deadly aim, indomitable pluck and iron nerve!

Then there flashed before all the story told by Doc Denning of the attack on the stage-coach, and the vision of Red Fred's death, the bold front displayed to Bitter Creek Bob, and the further fact that the beautiful being before them was a girl gambler!

It was startling; it was an enigma; none could reconcile such facts with the revelation before them.

Now they understood why the Rules had been posted—why no drinking was allowed, no smoking tolerated, and all profanity barred.

No need of rules, for, rough, uncouth and depraved as the majority of those present certainly were, not one would have said a word to bring a blush to the face of the Queen of Fortune.

But, why was she a Queen of Fortune?

Who was she?

What was she?

Why had she come to that wild land?

Why come among men as wild as animals, and as vicious as sin could render them?

And, too, she came as a gambler!

The rights or wrongs of this calling for her did not strike them.

She was a woman—the first who had ever appeared in Gold Dust City!

The Upper Mines, in the valley, had been envied, for their two women residents, such as they were, while Gold Dust City had not one!

Now the thought went the rounds that Gold Dust City was a paradise, it had an angel!

The landlord seemed as much surprised as did the crowd.

Doc Denning appeared to be completely stunned by the feminine denouement.

The Ten of Diamonds were there, and, looked at each other in a curious way.

Was this beautiful creature a detective?

Then Dick Drew thought:

"If a gambler, why not a detective?"

The clouds of tobacco smoke had drifted away; the fumes of liquor were gone; those who had come there drunk, found themselves sobered by the shock and excitement of the transformation.

The silence of death rested upon all, for the moment. No one, apparently, dared or cared to break that silence.

It was left for the Queen to do that, when she would, and so all looked and waited in intense expectancy.

It seemed minutes and minutes to them, yet it was only one second.

What they beheld was a tall, slender, graceful form, clad in red silk, and with a superb display of diamonds ornamenting her arms, neck, fingers and hair.

About her waist was a belt with a diamond buckle, and upon each hip rested a gold-mounted revolver, ready for use.

Her face was one to fascinate, her grand eyes seeming to rest, individually, upon every face before her.

She swept out of the door, leant one hand upon the table where stood the wheel of fortune, and for a few moments gazed at the upturned faces before her.

Then she spoke, and her voice was full, rich and perfectly distinct.

What she said was:

"Gentlemen, I welcome you one and all.

"You welcomed me as a stranger in your midst and I thank you.

"You knew me as Dare Kingdon; the Boy Gambler, and named me, also, as the Sunday Sport—will you not rechristen me now that you see me as a girl?"

"The Queen of Fortune!" shouted a voice.

A roar of voices took up the name and as the girl bowed there was sudden silence again.

"Gentlemen, I have come to make my home among you, for a while.

"Here I shall live; and it will please me to play two parts—that of the Queen of Fortune, and again, as Dare Kingdon, the Sunday Sport.

"I feel as safe in your midst as if I were your own sister or daughter.

"Here I reign supreme, and here I will risk my luck against yours, and I warn you that I was born under a lucky star.

"Gentlemen, the games are open!" and she stepped before the wheel of fortune, and gave it a turn, calling upon Landlord Jerry to deal the cards for her at the faro table, which he cheerfully did.

At once the miners of Gold Dust began to play, but there was no shouting, no profanity; a hushed atmosphere pervaded the place until midnight, when the Queen of Fortune touched her bell.

The Girl Gambler had proven her words.—she was born under a lucky star.

CHAPTER XLVI.

"MAKING A NIGHT OF IT."

THE crowd left the old fort with food for thought.

The men had played a square game at the dice and card tables, giving in the exact percentage due.

There was not a man there, however desperate he might be, who would have dared do otherwise, for he would have found himself in a terrible scrape, at once.

The wheel of fortune had won steadily, though many of the players had also been winners, and most every man had tempted the wheel because the Queen of Fortune stood behind it.

Once she had left the wheel to Doc Denning to turn, while she strolled through the hall.

All the players and observers arose at her approach, and she soon returned to the platform, where she relieved Landlord Jerry at the faro-table.

The way she shuffled and manipulated the cards proved her an adept in their use, and she won two out of three of her bets.

When the bell sounded at midnight, the evening's gambling was over. She arose; the men gave her three cheers and filed out—Landlord Jerry and Doc Denning being the last to go.

"You are not afraid to stay alone, Queen?" asked Jerry.

"Why now any more than last night?" she asked, with a smile.

"I thought you were a man then."

"Thank you; I am not afraid. Good-night," and her particular friends and self-constituted guardians also departed; the bright light at the entrance was quenched a moment after.

And Jerry's Joy was crowded ten minutes after the crowd left the old fort, and the crowd had something to talk about, too; so their silence for three hours broke out into boisterous conversation, and drinking, gambling and smoking were the order of the night.

Jerry's Joy was soon a cloud of smoke, the air was filled with profanity, the clinking of glasses, loud laughter and a roar of voices.

One and all had to confess that the Girl Gambler had played a bold game, but an astonishingly clever one as well—that she had made herself solid with every citizen of Gold Dust City, and had become, in reality, the Queen of the Camps.

Even Bitter Creek Bob had been subdued into quietude in her presence, although he broke out into decidedly boisterous behavior after reaching Jerry's Joy.

Remembering how the giant miner had been quieted by Buffalo Bill, and had accepted a favor from the supposed youth, Dare Kingdon, several men who had had cause to particularly dread the ruffian's great strength, terrible temper and deadly blows, were determined that he should not put on his braggart airs and not be reminded of his downfall.

He must be cowed, they thought, ere he broke out again as before as the cock-a-doodle-do of the camp.

So, in an unguarded moment, a man attempted to put Bitter Creek Bob down—in other words, to "sit upon him, hard."

It was done very quickly, what followed—just how, no one knew; but there were several pistol-shots and a terribly hard fall; a man went down, shot through the heart; and another lay writhing upon the floor with a broken back, while Bitter Creek Bob was unhurt and looking around for more victims.

At one step he had reached his former prestige, and again was the strong man of the mines—the ideal of the desperadoes—the terror of the town.

But Buffalo Bill was not there, many thought, and more regretted the fact.

The Ten of Diamonds were likewise in strong evidence that night in Jerry's Joy, and were gambling, drinking and enjoying themselves in their own way, and frequently to the detriment of the enjoyment of others.

Dick Drew was not a drinking man, and kept an eye upon any of the Ten whom he felt might drink too much, for, as he explained—it was time to interfere when a man proposed making a fool of himself.

Dick Drew had tried his luck at fortune's wheel up in the fort, and also at the faro table, and seemed to be greatly impressed with the Girl Gambler, risking considerable money recklessly; but in Jerry's Joy saloon he played with great caution, and was a winner, which caused him to mutter:

"I always lost to that Girl Gambler, and why was it, I wonder?"

"I'll try her again and again, for luck cannot come my way, here, always, and yet as steadily desert me there."

It was after dawn when the last game was played, and the last man staggered out of the saloon to try and find his way to his cabin.

Thus closed the night of the opening of the Girl Gambler's saloon, and, as in the early morning a number of miners with uncertain step and swollen heads were reeling their way to their cabins, they heard the rapid clatter of hoofs, and then dashed past them a horse and rider.

The rider was the Girl Gambler!

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE MINER'S WARNING.

BUFFALO BILL left Fort Advance well fitted out for his mission to Gold Dust Valley.

He was mounted upon his very best horse, and carried along a fair match for him which was to serve as a pack-animal for food, clothing and ammunition.

In fact the scout was prepared for a race, a chase, a fight or a siege.

His pack-horse was so well trained that he did not have to be led, but trotted behind as faithfully as a dog would have done.

Going alone, the scout made up his mind to first pay a visit to the Upper Camps.

He had a desire to again meet Alf Ellis, as the man whom he had freed from his Mazeppa-like ride had called himself.

He wished to have a talk with Ellis, and learn more of the one who was a striking counterpart of the man whom he had killed at Lone Hand Sam's camp, and who also bore the name of the dead man—in fact, had been punished as their traitor chief by the four masked men who had met him on the trail.

With this intention, the scout turned the head of his horse toward the Upper Camps, as the mining settlement fifty miles up the valley above Gold Dust City was called.

This settlement was far more scattered than Gold Dust City; the cabins were in valley and on the mountain, and here and there was a store with a cluster of saloons about it; that was all.

Known by the rather poetical name of Golden Hope, it was as bad a community as could be found, Gold Dust City really being good in comparison, for the hand of every man there seemed against every other.

But, Buffalo Bill had been to Golden Hope before, and knew several miners there, discharged soldiers on the search for gold, and he hoped to glean some information which he could not openly ascertain in Gold Dust City.

He timed his arrival so as to arrive after dark, and had passed several of the cabins along the trail, that indicated his being in the settlement, when he met a man whom he asked if he knew a miner by the name of Alf Ellis.

"I does, and he's in luck," was the answer.

"Where can I find his cabin?"

"Ther trail leads off jist here, and yer foler ther canyon up a couple o' miles, and ther cabin sits ter ther left in a hollow—right whar thar is a big cliff ahind it; but I tell yer he is in luck."

"I am glad to hear it. Has he struck it rich?"

"You bet he has; and I'm glad, fer he's a mighty good feller; but, he'd better look out close, fer thar is men here who would jump his savings mighty quick."

"You be a stranger, hain't yer?"

"Yes."

"A friend of his?"

"Yes."

"Then tell him Caleb Locke says ter sleep with one eye open, and to-night too, fer his good luck has come ter ther ears of some as would rather rob a dead man than a live one, thar's less risk in it."

Promising to inform the miner what had been told him, and convinced that he was right, if Alf Ellis had indeed "struck it rich," Buffalo Bill rode on his way once more, and, at last came in sight of the cliff where he was to turn off.

There was the glimmer of a light down in the hollow and he found a little cabin there half hidden away among the rocks and trees.

A call brought a man promptly to the door, and the scout recognized the one he had taken from the runaway horse, and who had said he was Alf Ellis.

"Well, pard, I've come to see you."

"Ah! you are my rescuer! I am most glad to see you. Dismount, and I'll stake your horse out with mine, and soon have you some supper," said the man, heartily.

As he was eating his supper Buffalo Bill told the miner what Caleb Locke had said, and the reply came in a low, thoughtful voice:

"I believe he is right, for Caleb Locke is a worthless, bad fellow; but I have done him a service several times and he doubtless knows that I am to be the victim of a gang of Gold Beaters, as they call the outlaws here who rob the miners of their luck."

"I have had luck, for I have found a dozen rich pockets of late, every one of them worth a small fortune."

"It was the day after my return, and when I was feeling mighty blue; but I suppose I am to be killed and robbed."

"I would not take that view of it, but fight them."

"Come, bring your blankets, and we'll camp where we can guard the cabin, and to-morrow get your gold into the hands of the stage agent for safe keeping and let it be known you keep none here, for that is what tempts them."

"You are still my friend, Mr. Cody," answered the miner, and half an hour after the two were camped for the night in a spot where they could command the cabin thoroughly.

Buffalo Bill was just dropping off to sleep when he heard a sound that caused him to say to his companion:

"Your midnight visitors have come."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE MINER'S STORY.

THE Gold Miner, aroused by the low words of Buffalo Bill, was at once ready for action.

He had led the scout to the very spot from which to command the approach to the cabin and all about it.

A large rock stood a hundred feet away, and the top of it was covered by a growth of stunted pines.

Here is where the blankets had been spread for the night, and the trail to the little house led close by it.

The scout had heard voices, and there soon came into view the shadowy forms of three men.

As the trail winding around the rock brought them in full view of the cabin they halted and a voice said:

"That's his layout, and all is dark, so I guess he's gone ter bed."

"Does yer reckon he'll open up to us?"

"I guess so, for I'll play I'm a pard wantin' a lodgin'; but ef he don't open, why we kin jist lay low and git him when he comes out at daylight, for you bet he'll go ter work early."

"Then we'll tap him on ther head, and he's got three horses fer us ter git away on arter we git ther boodle."

"All right; you know best, pard, so you lead an' we follers, only I'd like ter lose no time ef we kin do it ter-night and not wait ontill morning."

"Then come along, pards, and he's a dead man and ther boodle is ours."

"No! Halt! hands up!"

The stern voice came from above them, not twenty feet away, and there were three yells of terror uttered in chorus.

But then the idea of escape dawned upon the leader of the trio, and he made a sudden bound in flight to fall dead under a shot from the miner.

The other two stood trembling with fright and yelled in chorus:

"Don't shoot! don't shoot! We give up!"

It would have been better for them had they been shot then and there.

But the scout and the miner at once came down from the rock. The ruffians were soon made prisoners and securely bound, the dead man being carried with them to the cabin, where all passed the night.

As the scout and miner sat outside talking together, the latter told the story of his life.

It was a story of a wrong done him, a life wrecked thereby.

"I was born rich," he said, in his quiet way, "and the future seemed bright before me."

"But I had a brother, a twin brother, who was the very bane of my life."

"He broke the heart of my mother, when all his misdeeds became known, and her fortune went to save him from the gallows."

"A splendid fellow by the name of Burr loved a beautiful girl who returned his affection, but this brother of mine separated them by false stories about him, put upon him crimes he himself was guilty of, and married her, her parents forcing her to accept him, believing his stories of his riches."

"To her surprise she found that she was to have the care of two children, his own, he claimed, by another wife of whom he had told her nothing."

"But at last her eyes were opened to his guilt, and she discovered from his own lips, when he lay ill and in delirium, that her first lover had been innocent of the crimes of which he had been accused, and had fled to save himself from prison, as he could produce no proof of his innocence."

"He told, too, in his delirium, that the children were not his own, that he was keeping them for an Englishman who had kidnapped them in England, and one day they were to bring to him a fortune when he restored them."

"Then the noble wife deserted her wicked husband, my brother, and took the children with her, having had witnesses to his confessions in his delirium."

"He recovered from his severe illness and went on the search for his wife just as I was looking for him to tell him of our mother's death, and that we were penniless through his misdeeds."

"I unfortunately went to the home of his poor wife, who had, upon leaving him, had a detective look up her old lover, Doctor Burr, and tell him that his innocence was established, and to advise him to return home."

"He did come back, saw her, planned for her to get a divorce from her husband, whom by fear she could force to give her her freedom from him, and so it was arranged."

"But, Alfred Ellis heard of the doctor's return and wrote a note to his wife that he would kill him on sight."

"Instead of killing the doctor, however, the latter shot my brother, and, believing he had killed him, not wishing to go to prison and have to fight all the old charges against him, Aubrey Burr again fled and went into hiding, while my brother's unfortunate wife went away with the children whom she loved as her own, and lived the life of a recluse."

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE LOST MINER.

THE miner paused, as though he did not like to recall the past, but as Buffalo Bill made no comment on what he had told him, he continued:

"The report got out that my brother died, which was not true, as I learned long after; but, believing him to be dead, his wife, who kept up a correspondence with Aubrey Burr, set to work to clear Aubrey's name of the guilt upon it and made the whole story known of her husband's crimes."

"Then Aubrey Burr sent for her to come to him in Texas, where he had a ranch, and with no doubt of the death of Alfred Ellis, they were married."

"There they lived happily for several years, the two adopted children with them and a great joy to their lives."

"But, once more misfortune dogged their lives, for the Comanches, led by Mexican outlaws, swept down upon their home, and Doctor Burr lost every dollar he had in the world, for his ranch was burned, his grain destroyed

and his herds of horses and cattle driven off.

"Taking his family to a neighbor's ranch, he left them to go off and seek his fortune in the mines.

"That was two years ago. He had sent his wife money for her support, at last writing that he had struck it rich and would soon come home with a large fortune.

"But his letter also contained the startling tidings that he had met Alf Ellis or his ghost in the mines!

"By a strange coincidence, I stopped one night in my wanderings at the home of Mrs. Burr, and my arrival gave her a terrible fright until she knew I was the twin brother of her wicked first husband.

"From me she learned that my brother was not dead, and she implored me then to go in search of Doctor Burr and tell him all the to her sad truth.

"I pledged myself to do so.

"Her children, as she called those who had so strangely come into her care, had grown up, the daughter being a beautiful girl then teaching school in the frontier settlement, while the boy was captain of a band of young Texan Rangers and Vigilantes, who kept the country protected from the Mexican raiders and Comanches.

"The son I did not see, but I heard wonderful tales of his heroism, splendid horsemanship, and great daring, while his sister, reared on the frontier, was an expert horsewoman, a dead shot, and from her skill with the lariat, had won the name of the Lasso Queen.

"My life had been wrecked by my brother's deeds. I was a wanderer, with only such means as I could earn, and I was glad to go on the mission Mrs. Burr sent me upon, for she supplied me liberally with funds.

"She gave me the address from whence the last letter from her husband had been mailed, and there I went.

"But I could find no trace of Aubrey Burr, and at last came to the conclusion that he had changed his name.

"I wrote to Mrs. Burr, but got no reply to my letters, and at last, with no means left, I went to work in the mines and drifted here, where, let me tell you, I have at last found a fortune."

"I certainly am glad to hear that," asserted the scout.

"Thank you; but I have not found Doctor Burr, yet, from my experience ten days ago at the hands of those four masked men, I am sure that my brother is in the mines, and I was mistaken for him, for we are strikingly alike, as I said."

Buffalo Bill was lost in thought for a few moments, and then he said:

"No, your brother does not live, for you forget that the man I killed at the camp of the miner Lone Hand Sam bore the name of Alf Ellis, and was your counterpart."

"True. Then he is dead, and it is far better so. If you killed him, you have twice saved my life, and we are friends.

"He was a depraved man, and deserved his fate.

"But fortune has smiled upon me, at last, and I shall continue the search for Doctor Aubrey Burr, to atone, by finding him and assuring him and his wife of Alfred's death, for my brother's crimes toward them both."

"And you call yourself also Alf Ellis?"

"Yes, his name was Alfred, mine Alphonse, and the same nickname of Alf we both were given."

"I see; but now, my advice to you is to put your gold at once into the hands of the stage-agent, to send it Eastward as he can, and you continue your gold hunting here for the present, keeping out of sight all you can.

"Certainly you must not go near Gold Dust City, nor be seen by miners from there, for you will be taken for your brother, and that would mean your death, as you have already had a proof of what he might expect.

"I will go on to Gold Dust City to-day, and will know where to find you when I want you, for your story has set me to thinking, and I have certain trails I wish to follow to the end.

"Now let us take the dead body and two prisoners to the camps, for it is nearly day-break," and, soon after, the scout and the miner rode away with the latter's gold, the corpse and the prisoners.

CHAPTER L.

SPEEDY JUSTICE.

It was just sunrise when Buffalo Bill and the miner rode up to the central camp with the body and the two prisoners.

Alphonse Ellis was known as a peaceable, hard-working man, who attended to his own business and let that of other people alone.

He had lately found gold in large quantities, it was known, and many a poor devil had been the better for it, as he had shared liberally.

When, therefore, he came in with Buffalo Bill, and with the corpse of the man he had killed and the two prisoners he had captured, there was at once considerable excitement among the miners who were getting their morning drinks at the saloons, or their breakfasts at the eating-houses.

Alf Ellis made it his first duty to go to the stage-agent's and get rid of his gold, receiving his receipt for an amount of yellow metal to be sent East, that would pan out a fortune for him.

Then he told the crowd of an intended attack upon him under cover of the night.

The dead man was recognized as one of the hardest characters about the camp, while his companions, the two prisoners, had often been suspected of crimes, but proof was wanting of their guilt and so they had been spared.

There were a score of men in the camps who knew Buffalo Bill, and word quickly went from lip to lip that the great scout was in Golden Hope Camps, and was the pard of the Miner of Monument Canyon, as he was called, from the fact that the huge rock which was his cabin, had the appearance of an enormous monument.

Leaving the prisoners in the care of a couple of miners Buffalo Bill and Ellis went into an eating place for their breakfast.

It was not a very tempting meal, and it did not take them long to find out that they did not wish much of it they heard no excitement meanwhile outside, but when they returned to where they had left their horses, Buffalo Bill suddenly halted, and cried:

"Look there!"

Miner Ellis did look, and what he saw was a large crowd while hanging to a limb over their heads, strung up by lariats, were the two prisoners they had brought into the camps.

They were already dead.

Buffalo Bill was angry.

He had intended to send the prisoners by coach to a point where the stage to the fort would be met, and have them transferred to it to be turned over to Colonel Mayo for trial for their crimes.

But in that wild land matters did not always turn out as planned.

"Say, pard, don't git mad, 'cause it's all over now, and yer see we has wanted these fellers fer some time ter hang 'em, and now it's done did."

"We didn't make no racket ter disturb yer at yer breakfast, but we jist h'isted 'em quiet, and thar they is as a warnin' ter other Gold-Dusters who robs honest miners, and ther hangin' don't cost nuthin' fer trial, and witnesses, fer you said as how they was after robbin' our pard from Monument Canyon, and your word goes in these camps, Buffalo Bill.

"Will yer take a drink?"

Buffalo Bill declined the invitation, and had the good sense to find no fault with a deed that was beyond recall, so after a few pleasant words with the spokesman, and a regret that he could not accept the pressing invitation to remain to the triple funeral, with the added hint that there might be another corpse furnished for burial in an hour or two, he mounted his horse and rode back with Ellis to his cabin.

There he waited until after dinner, got his pack-horse and telling the miner to be very watchful, and not be caught napping, he bade him good-by and took the trail for Gold Dust City, determined to camp on the way at night and go in early the next morning.

It was yet half an hour before sunset when he found a good camping-place, and, as soon as he had had his supper, turned in for the night.

But he was in the saddle bright and early,

determined to press on to Gold Dust City for breakfast.

Riding along at a canter, with his pack-horse keeping close up, he passed into a little valley half a mile long by a quarter in width.

A narrow pass was the entrance to it, and Buffalo Bill remembered that the exit was very much of the same kind, and he muttered:

"A bad place this for a man to be ambushed, for he would be cut off at each pass."

He had hardly uttered the words when he saw several horsemen in the narrow pass before him.

And they were coming toward him, their rifles in hand.

He halted and glanced behind him, and there he saw three more just coming out of the pass he had just come through.

"Five to one—a close call this," he muttered, as he unslung his rifle for use.

CHAPTER LI.

IN A TRAP.

BUFFALO BILL was in a trap and he knew it.

If he had any doubt that the men meant mischief, two things convinced him of it.

The first was that he saw that there were five men, all mounted, three ahead, two behind him, and they all wore black masks.

They were armed with rifles, too, and had them ready for use.

The second proof of their being foes was that Buffalo Bill recognized in the force ahead a horse he knew.

It was a spotted mustang, most peculiarly marked, for he was black and white, his mane snow-white, his tail jet black.

That very horse Buffalo Bill had seen a miner riding the day before at Golden Hope.

He had also noticed, along the trail, after he had started on his way, the fresh tracks of a horse going at a rapid pace.

So all along he had kept an eye open for a ambush from the man who had left the camps ahead of him.

Now he saw that strangely-marked horse with the party who headed him off!

That it must be a fight to the death Buffalo Bill felt assured, and with the chances greatly against him.

He knew that in having saved Lone Hand Sam's treasure wagon, in killing Alf Ellis, and in being rescued he had won the eternal hatred of the masked band of outlaws. He had added to the hatred by his defeat of Bitter Creek George, and again by killing the man sent to ambush him when he left Gold Dust City with the two English detectives, for, as the intended assassin had not turned up again, his companions could readily surmise that he had met the scout and had the tables turned on him.

Therefore he realized most fully that he was to meet men who would show him no mercy.

He halted, brought his horses side by side, and stood between them, at bay, his rifle ready to use first upon one party then the other.

The masked men, meanwhile, were approaching slowly.

They did not open fire, and the scout would not throw a shot away; he would wait to discover their game; that done, he would fight to the death.

Halting about four hundred feet from the scout, the party from each side appeared to feel that they had him in a trap from which there was no escape—that he was wholly at their mercy, though he might kill one or more of them. It certainly looked so.

But, calm and watchful stood Buffalo Bill. A volley might kill him before he could do much harm. If it did not, then his repeating rifle would rattle forth bullets sent unerringly.

"Ho, Buffalo Bill!" cried one of the masked men.

"That's my name," shouted back the scout.

"We want you!"

"All right! Come and take me."

"We've got you corralled."

"It looks that way certainly."

"Do you surrender?"

"I rather guess not."

"Do you wish to die?"
 "Not much, for I'm under treatment just now to prolong my life."
 "I will offer you terms."

"All right, I'm always ready to make a bargain."
 "We will spare your life if you will lead us to the treasure of Lone Hand Sam, which we know you hid somewhere."

"Oh, that's your little game is it?"
 "That's our big game, William!"
 "Well, as I do not know where the gold is, I guess you won't get it, so you had better set to work to kill me."

"We don't wish to kill you, and you are a fool to throw your life away; but we will kill you, for we have much to avenge against you, so think it over for ten minutes and then if you refuse our terms, die you shall."
 "Thanks," and Buffalo Bill was quietly getting ready for action.

His quick aim would bring down one of his foes, perhaps two, before they returned his shots; his horses would protect him in a great measure from a volley, after which he would open again and the fight would be on for life or death.

So he quietly picked out the man he would drop first—the one who had spoken.

He began to bring his rifle up for a quick aim, keeping it hidden, however, to the last, and in another moment it would have been rattling forth death to some one when there dashed into the valley a horse and rider.

Not an outlaw saw the approach of the one who came through the pass in front of the scout, until, clear and ringing, came the words:

"Hold there! What does this mean?"
 The outlaws heard the voice, turned in dismay and beheld a woman!

She was dressed in a blue riding habit, trimmed with gold; an embroidered sombrero was upon her head, and her horse, a superb one, was handsomely equipped.

She did not halt, but came on fearlessly, at a run, while again came the words:

"What does this mean?"

CHAPTER LII.

A FAIR DEFENDER.

THE fair vision swept around the three horsemen, passed between them and their comrades toward the other pass, and rode quickly up to Buffalo Bill.

There she halted, and facing the three men, called out again:

"I asked you what this cowardly attack of five men against one meant?"

The masked outlaws seemed completely nonplused.

They sat their horses in seeming dismay, not knowing just what to do.

But the spokesman found his voice, and responded:

"It's just this, Queen of Fortune:
 "That thar man is Buffalo Bill, and he's downed a number of our pards, and we wants to avenge 'em; but we is willing to be marcful and let him go, if he will tell us whar a treasure he knows about is hid."

"That's just it, Queen of Fortune."

"Are you willing to accept their terms, sir?" and the young girl turned toward Buffalo Bill, who was astounded at her coming, and startled at her resemblance to the youth, Dare Kingdon.

"I accept no terms, fair pard, with such cattle as they are, and was just getting ready to fight it out when you appeared."

"I will save you," was the low reply of the girl, and then raising her voice she called out:

"Buffalo Bill gives the reply I expected, that he will make no terms with outlaws, but I do not care to witness a scene of bloodshed, nor care to see you taken prisoners, carried to Gold Dust and hanged by those who are coming on after me, so I will tell you that if you will go now, and quickly, I will not put Doc Denning and others on your trail."

"Will you accept my terms, or wait for my friends, who must soon appear?"

"We'll go," shouted the leader quickly, and the three spurred toward the further end of the valley.

But there was heard again:

"You git off this time, Buffalo Bill, 'cause ther Queen o' Fortune saves yer; but jist

wait until next time, and it will be Lone Hand Sam's treasure or your life."

"All right—next time," shouted the scout as the five men were now in full gallop, anxiously looking back to see if the party with the Girl Gambler did not dash into view.

"Well, young lady, I owe you my life, and I see, after all, that I was right in my suspicion that my boy pard, Dare Kingdon, is a girl," remarked the scout, as he held out his hand, which the young gambler warmly grasped as she laughed lightly and responded:

"So you did think I was a girl, Buffalo Bill, and I did not fool you?"

"But come, mount and ride back with me, for I have no one near, as I implied."

"So I thought. It was just like you. But, what shall I call you now, Girl Pard, since you have come out in your true colors, and no longer play the boy?"

"Call me Girl Pard, for I like the name, though the miners christened me, last night, the Queen of Fortune."

"You shed your male attire, then, when you opened your gambling den?"

"Yes, I opened last night and had a crowded house. Why, the men were fairly startled when Dare Kingdon was metamorphosed into a girl, and they treated me with the most marked respect."

"Oh yes; all but a few would do that, and those who felt like treating you otherwise would be kept down by fear, for the better element would stand no nonsense."

"But, may I thank you for your great service to me in being my fair defender, and then ask why you ever appeared as a youth?"

"Don't thank me, for the debt I owe you is by no means canceled, yet."

"As for my masquerading in male attire, why, a man can go where a woman cannot and can do what one of the fair sex, as we are called, dare not."

"I shall not yet make known to you my secret, though I trust you fully; but I will tell you that I came here on a special mission, and I expect, some day, to have to ask your aid in accomplishing it."

"I will go back to Gold Dust City alone, and you must follow later. My evenings are three times a week, so come to-morrow night with the others to see me; but do not come alone, for I receive no one at my cabin alone."

"Good-by for the present!"

They had passed out of the valley now, and she held out her hand in farewell; but as the scout took it she queried:

"Did you recognize any of those five men under their masks?"

"I did not."

"I did," and at once spoke to her horse and bounded away, leaving Buffalo Bill in surprised quandary as to who and what the Gambler Queen really was.

CHAPTER LIII.

DOC DENNING'S NEWS.

BUFFALO BILL rode on slowly after the Gambler Queen left him, and his mind was busy in conning over his late adventure with the outlaws, and from whom she had so cleverly rescued him, doubtless from certain death.

He knew that she did not wish to be seen riding into the camps with him, and he had no desire to disregard her wishes in that respect.

He saw that her trail branched off from the main one a mile further on, and knew that she could enter the valley at another point; but how it was that she, a young girl, knew the trails so well he could not understand.

"A young girl, yes, but with a deadly eye and nerves of fine spun steel."

"I wonder why she comes here," muttered the scout, as he rode on.

Then he recalled that she had told him she knew one or more of the masked outlaws.

Who they were Buffalo Bill did not know, but could guess that some of them, at least, were of the party which had followed Lone Hand Sam, had tied Alphonse Ellis to his horse, believing him to be their traitor chief, and had set out to take his life.

That they believed he knew where the treasure of Lone Hand Sam was—in fact, had hidden it himself—he felt convinced,

and this supposed knowledge would protect his life at their hands for awhile.

Their plan would be to make him a prisoner, and force from him the secret hiding place of Lone Hand Sam's gold.

To find out just who they were he intended to make his first duty upon reaching Gold Dust City.

"I've got my hands full, I think," he mused, as he rode along and recalled that he must ascertain who Lone Hand Sam really was, and who were his heirs.

Then he had to solve the mystery hanging over the Girl Gambler.

Next, there was the discovery of facts for the two English detective officers, as to what one of Buck Bradley's friends were familiar enough with the facts of Bradley's life to give a clue by which the kidnapped children could be traced and identified.

Still further: there was the discovery of the men who had acknowledged Alf Ellis as their chief, and the ferreting out the masked outlaws who had so nearly ended his days at Lone Hand Sam's camp, and again had tried to assassinate him but half an hour before in the little valley.

Yet another thing was not to be forgotten: to find out, from the description given him of Doctor Aubrey Burr, if there was such a man working in the mines of Gold Dust Valley.

"Yes, I have my hands full with all these mysteries to unravel, and must play a lone hand, too, in what I well know is a game against great odds. The only men I feel sure I can trust in all the Gold Dust camps are Landlord Jerry and Doc Denning, but Doc being away much of the time I cannot count much on his help."

"However, I have a feeling that my Girl Pard will aid me, for, that she is here not for profits on gambling alone, but for some deep, perhaps good purpose, that I feel is certain."

"I am sorry she discarded trowsers for petticoats, as she could have helped me far more by playing boy."

Thus cogitating, Buffalo Bill rode on his way, his pack-horse keeping close up behind, until at last he started on the trail leading down into Gold Dust Valley.

It was still early, the sun having just risen to a height to peer over the range into the valley; but he knew that Landlord Jerry breakfasted late, himself, and he would be in time for him.

"I must keep an eye open for that black and white pony, as it was his rider who came on ahead and gave warning to others, here, that I was coming."

"His rider will not know that I observed the animal in Golden Hope, yesterday, and again in the valley where they trapped me, and so will be on the lookout for him again."

"But I will be on the lookout, for a certainty," and Buffalo Bill smiled complacently.

Nodding pleasantly as here and there he passed a miner's camp, he at length rode up to the Good Luck Inn.

Doc Denning was there and greeted him warmly, adding:

"I am waiting breakfast for Landlord Jerry, Pard Bill, so we'll be three of a kind fer yer looks hungry."

"I don't belie my looks, Doc."

"Good! I'm allus hungry when I'm awake."

"But, yer sh'u'd hev' been here last night to ther opening of ther gambling lay-out up in ther old fort, fer it were jist grand, and I've got news ter tell yer thet will make yer go and git drunk."

"What is it, Doc?"

"Why, ther boy is a gal! Ther kid wears petticoats! She ain't no young man, but is ther sweetest leddy I ever seen, and gambles as she shoots—ter win! But, here comes Landlord Jerry, and when I gits su'thin' ter eat I kin talk, and will, you bet!"

CHAPTER LIV.

THE SCOUT'S TWO ALLIES.

BUFFALO BILL could see by the glances cast upon him, by the numerous idlers standing about, that they wondered at his coming back to Gold Dust City so soon.

He, apparently, did not notice this scrutiny, but he did sharply scan the face of every man he saw so that he would know it again,

and went in with Landlord Jerry and Doc Denning to breakfast.

Jerry had the reputation of feeding his guests well, and he did so for two reasons—one a desire to act squarely with a man, giving him the worth of his money, and the other because he was a good liver himself, enjoyed a substantial meal immensely, and wished every one else to do so.

He had ordered an extra good meal that morning, as Doc Denning had said he would, so there was plenty and to spare for Buffalo Bill, and Jerry was more than delighted to have the scout for his guest.

At first the conversation was wholly between Cody and the landlord, for Doc Denning had no time to talk and to eat, too.

Questions were asked as to the news at the fort, the movements of the Indians, what had become of the Englishmen, and if anything of importance had brought the scout back to Gold Dust City so soon?

Thus far the scout had only replied to Jerry's questions, and had heard no news of goings on in the Valley Camps; but Denning had now cut the edge off of his generous appetite, and broke out with:

"Durn ther news at ther fort, landlord, while we has so much to tell of goings on here!"

"What has happened out of the usual run, Doc, at Gold Dust?" asked the scout, who saw the stage-driver's anxiety to tell something he had on his mind.

"Why, as I told yer, thet boy were a gal."

"Well, that is a startling piece of news, indeed. How did it happen?" smilingly inquired the scout.

"Why, I'll tell yer."

"I does remember thet you said as how you believed he was a gal, arter ther hold-up of ther coach, and again arter ther way he cut down Red Fred and held his grip with Bitter Creek Bob until you chipped in; but, Pard William, nobody expected ther treat he did give us."

"Why, he just scattered ther dust he got, by killing Red Fred, around among ther fellers, tuck Bitter Creek Bob in ter work ther mine on shares, fixed himself up with Jerry's help here in great style in thet old haunted fort, which I wouldn't sleep in alone fer a clean thousand dollars, and then bought him some of the best horses in ther valley and pranced around ther camps, ridin' like a Comanche."

"That wasn't all, by a hat full, fer he asked Landlord Jerry ter invite ther hull crowd up last night, and they went, you jist bet they did—every galoot ov 'em!"

"He burned oil, too, and taller candles, fer ther place were lit up fine, ther fellers filed in, me and Landlord Jerry bein' on hand, and all of us read ther rules stuck on ther walls."

"Waal, some of ther men guyed ther rules, some smoked, others cussed, and more whipped out flasks and begun ter drink, while we all waited, I knowin' suthin' war going ter happen."

"And it did?"

"Yer bet it did! Pard William, fer right thar ther boy pulled out and ther gal tuck a hand in ther game!"

"She held trump keerds, too, and they was her face, fer like a angil, as had slipped out o' heaven fer a picnic, she come inter ther door, jist when Hades hed bu'st loose and ther devil were uppermost."

"Why, Pard Bill, ther moment she come in, ther hush thet come over thet crowd were more solemn then a funeral—wasn't it, landlord?"

"It was indeed, Doc."

"Thar she stood, and her eyes struck dead center, her smile jist caught ther whole community, me along with ther rest o' ther gang."

"But, pard, ther gambling begun then, and you bet she played ter win, stacked high, smiled if she lost, showed no backin' down, and tarned 'em all out at midnight with a cheer fer her thet must hev skeered all ther old ghosts away from ther durned old roost."

Buffalo Bill listened to Denning's story with a great deal of interest, for he was anxious to know just what had occurred, and how it all had happened.

He was glad to feel that the Girl Gambler had "caught the camps," so to speak, and the thought flashed upon him if he could

only trust her and make her his secret ally, he could find out much and accomplish wonders.

But he said in his quiet way:

"Well, pards, I have returned to Gold Dust City for work, and am going to ask your aid, for you can help me. I may say, there is much to do, and big results when it is done, and so may have to call upon you to stand by me. What do you say?"

"Count me in, Bill," fervently responded Landlord Jerry, while from Doc Denning came an emphatic:

"Me, too, Pard William; yours to command, every time!"

"Thank you, Jerry! thank you, Doc! This makes me full-handed in the game, and if I don't win it will be no fault of yours, that I know," was the scout's earnest response.

CHAPTER LV.

CLOSE QUESTIONING.

THOUGH he felt secure in his two allies, Buffalo Bill was one to go cautiously in all that he did.

That the best of men went wrong at times, he had painfully learned in his wide experience.

Landlord Jerry and Doc Denning were trusty and true, but the driver was a great talker, and the former at times got on a spree, and a talking man often says far more than he intended, and when a man drinks he loses his discretion.

So the scout, planning with exceeding caution, considering the snares he well understood were laid for him, went ahead slowly.

Cody began his search for information as soon as he and Jerry were alone together, after breakfast.

"Jerry, tell me all you know about this man, Alf Ellis, who, it is said, betraye his comrades and skipped off."

"Well, it's little I know, or any one else, I guess, for there was always something queer about him. He first appeared here two years ago; mined for awhile, then gambled; next took to the pick and shovel again and made a good thing of it, they said; at least he always had plenty of money, and was a successful gambler."

"Did you ever hear of his being connected with any band of outlaws?"

"Well, no; I can't say that I ever heard that."

"Was he not the chief of some secret outfit?"

"Well, he was one of the crowd known as the Ten of Diamonds, and I believed started the club."

"What kind of a club was it?"

"Oh, they stuck together as pards, chipped in with their earnings in a common pool, dressed a good deal alike, and wore diamonds, while there were ten of them, and so the boys named them the Diamond Ten."

"I see; but you never heard of any of them doing any act of outlawry?"

"Not according to Gold Dust Valley law; but they stuck together pretty well, and when one got into trouble the others were there to back him up, right or wrong."

"Still, the Diamond Ten stood well with the people, and now I learn that they have taken two more into the band in place of the two who robbed them and ran away, for though they don't own up, I think that was about it."

"Who was the other one who skipped off?"

"Buck Bradley."

"Jerry?"

"Yes, Bill."

"I wish you to do me a favor."

"I will if I can."

"You know all the members of the Diamond Ten?"

"Yes, I guess I does, for the two new ones taken in are Dud Nichols and Lem Sykes, men I know."

"And the others? I wish their names also."

"Well, there is Dick Drew, Wild Walter, and as the landlord named the Ten of Diamonds Buffalo Bill wrote them down."

Then the scout said:

"I wish you to point me out those men as you can."

"I will."

"Now did you ever hear of a man in these mines by the name of Aubrey?"

"No."

"Or Burr?"

"No."

"Or Liverpool?"

"No."

"Did you ever hear the name of Kit Castle?"

"I never did."

"Who would you say the man is I will now describe to you?"

"Tall, fully six feet, well formed, with broad shoulders; black eyes, large and with long lashes, with a look of sadness in them; dark hair and a full beard; a deep, sonorous voice; white, even teeth and quick in his movements; has little to say, yet is ever courteous, while he was freehanded to a fault, never seeking trouble, yet fearing no man."

"Well, I've got the man you describe in my mind, Bill, but he is not here now."

"Who would you say it was?"

"Lone Hand Sam."

"Ah! and he is not here now?"

"No, he made a fortune and left alone in a wagon with his own treasure, two weeks ago, and well able he was to protect it from any ordinary danger."

"Have you heard from him since he left?"

"I have not."

"Has any one?"

"Have not heard of it."

"Did you miss any one from the camps about the time he left?"

"Let me see, yes—Alf Ellis and Buck Bradley."

"Were you friendly with this man, Lone Hand Sam?"

"You bet I was! and I hated to see him go, for he was a perfect gentleman, Cody."

"Now tell me, Jerry, if you have any one in the mines who is a doctor?"

"Well, there is one here who calls himself a doctor, but he don't know much, for he came near cutting a miner's leg off when he was shot in the arm."

"But you must know some of the miners who have been physicians, for even if they wished to remain unknown they could not well hide the fact out here that they were doctors."

"One boss doctor was killed by Alf Ellis, some time ago. They were the best of friends, but Alf said the doctor went mad one night and was trying to kill him, so he had to shoot him."

"You knew of no other doctor in the mines?"

"Yes, by Jove, and a good one, though he tried to hide the fact except when duty demanded his services—it was Lone Hand Sam!"

CHAPTER LVI.

AN IMPORTANT DISCOVERY.

A PLEASED expression came over the face of Buffalo Bill as Landlord Jerry revealed what he did about Lone Hand Sam.

"Jerry, let me tell you something: I gave you a description of a man in these mines, and you said it was the likeness of Lone Hand Sam."

"Yes, so it was."

"And Lone Hand Sam was a doctor, as well?"

"Yes and a good one, too. A man was wounded one day, and was bleeding to death, but Sam stepped forward and said he could save him if he only had his case of surgical instruments, then at his cabin. Then I remembered that there was a case in my lumber-room, and I got it, and all who saw the miner work knew that he was an experienced surgeon, while more proof was that he saved the man's life."

"Well, Jerry, I am sorry to tell you bad news about your friend."

"No! Was he robbed?"

"He was killed!"

"Lord, no! Don't tell me that, Bill, for I did like that man a great deal!"

"I'll tell you how it was, and you must do all in your power to help me pick out in these camps the men who sought to kill and rob him, for they were too late to do the deed one man already had done, for some one was before them."

"You amaze me, Bill."

Buffalo Bill then told Landlord Jerry the

story, from his discovery of the dead miner to what had followed, and when he had finished he saw that his words had made a deep impression.

"Say, Pard Bill, I don't know what to think; but I cannot doubt, after what you tell me, that Lone Hand Sam is dead, and you are playing a lone hand to avenge him, I see; but I wish to chip in with you."

"Jerry, let me tell you frankly that you have one bad habit, and if you will pledge me your word not to take a drink until you have my permission, there is much more I can and will tell you. And more: you can help me carry out a plan I now have in mind, to corral Lone Hand Sam's murderers, for I put those who trailed him under that head."

"Here's my hand, Bill, and my pledge on it."

"I know you will do as you pledge, Jerry."

"You bet I will!"

"Now let me tell you that I think I can give you the name of Lone Hand Sam, and tell you something about him."

"Yes."

"It is very unfortunate that he should have lost his life just as he had won a fortune and was going home, for if he was the man I suspect, he had a wife and children awaiting him and a promise of happiness in his later years where, in his cabin life, all was sorrow and misfortune."

"Poor fellow!"

"There is a person in the Upper Valley at Golden Hope, who came out here to look up a man whom he described to me."

"It was the description I gave you, and he said, moreover, that the one he searched for was a doctor."

"I had Lone Hand Sam in my eye when he described him, and your recognition and what else you told me, settled it conclusively as far as I am concerned."

"Now, from what this man told me there are a wife and two children to benefit by Sam's fortune, if it can be found, and he can hardly have risked hiding it without sending some word through of its hiding-place in case of accident to him."

"You are right."

"By going to his cabin and following the trail he took with his wagon, I might hit upon the hiding-place, and might not; but, my idea is that he would have written his wife, describing the spot to her. Do you recall any letters he ever mailed, for you are postmaster here, I believe?"

"So I am, and what a fool I was not to think of it before! Yes, Cody, Sam used to mail a letter every month, but I did not notice the address; but before his departure I recall that he registered a package, and I know that the return receipt card has not come back to me. I'll look at the registry and see to whom it was addressed."

They were in Landlord Jerry's own den, hotel and post-office, in fact his room for all private work, and the book of registered letters was at once produced.

There were few such letters went out from Gold Dust City, so the item was found readily, and Landlord Jerry read:

"Mrs. Aubrey Burr."

"I knew I had placed my man!" cried Buffalo Bill with some excitement, and glancing at the book he saw that it was addressed to a border settlement in Texas, and upon the back was the note:

"This letter to be kept by P. M. until called for by party to whom addressed, or by writer producing registry receipt."

"That is good, for the letter, if not called for by Mrs. Burr, is still in the keeping of the postmaster, and I believe it will tell the secret of the hidden gold of Lone Hand Sam."

"Now, Jerry, I will take the trail at once for Golden Hope, but will return to-morrow, and soon after, mounted upon a fresh horse, and alone, Buffalo Bill was riding rapidly back to the Upper Mining Camps."

CHAPTER LVII.

TOBY'S TALE OF WOE.

ALPHONSE Ellis was startled at hearing a loud knock at his door at night after he had retired, and arose, expecting to have to defend his life.

It was a relief, then, for him, to hear the words:

"Open the door, Ellis, for I have just returned to see you about a matter of importance."

"Who are you?"

"Buffalo Bill."

"Ah! what proof can you give, for I must be cautious?"

"You are right; I'll give as proof the name of Mazeppa to which you are entitled, the name of Doctor Aubrey Burr, Alfred and Alphonse—"

"No more; I know now that is all right; but I was obeying your own instructions not to open my door to any one without proof of who they were and what they wanted."

The door was opened now and the scout stepped in, a candle having been lighted.

"Where is your horse?"

"I staked him out with yours; but I am hungry and very tired, for you know I slept none last night, so I will tell my story and go to bed. I am just from Gold Dust Valley and must return there to-morrow."

While the miner was wondering at Buffalo Bill's splendid powers of endurance he was getting him some supper, at the same time hearing the scout relate the story of Lone Hand Sam's having been none other than Doctor Aubrey Burr.

"What a terrible shock, and just as he was going home!"

"Yes, and I want you to find some one whom you can trust to work your mine on shares, and start for Texas with all haste, to see Mrs. Burr and her children, and tell them of the Doctor's sad fate."

"I will go gladly."

"I felt that you would; but, let me tell you that I am sure the letters you wrote Mrs. Burr never reached her for the reason that they were taken out by some one acting for your brother, who must have known of your presence here, as he did know all about Lone Hand Sam."

"A registered letter, however, sent by the miner to his wife escaped him, I feel sure, though there is no word of its having been received."

"Now, by going to Texas you can see her and tell her all, and ascertain also, if the letter I refer to does not describe the hiding-place of Lone Hand Sam's treasure."

"I will."

"This done, you can bring the son back with you, and if you have the map, or a description, I will find the gold for you."

"It was to tell you this that I returned at once to Golden Hope."

"I am glad that you did, for I will take stage to-morrow night, as I know a man I caught to work my mine on shares—the one who sent me the warning through you—Caleb Locke."

"Yes, the very person!" and having finished his supper the tired scout threw himself upon his blankets and was fast asleep in a moment.

In the morning, after breakfast, the two friends, as such they now were, and who had so strangely met, had a talk over their plans, after which the scout mounted his horse and started upon his return to Gold Dust City.

It was after nightfall when he rode into the camps, and knowing that it was early he could not account for not having met any miners.

The cabins which he passed were dark and seemed deserted.

"There has been some killing affair up at the saloons and all have gone there; but it must have been of great importance to call all the camps out," he mused, as he rode along.

At length he came in sight of the Good Luck Tavern and its adjacent saloon.

Even there he saw but a dim light and more than before wondered what was the matter.

As he halted Landlord Jerry's faithful man of all work, a negro, came forward to take his horse.

"Why, Toby, where are all the people to-night?" asked the scout.

"Done gone clean crazy, Massa Buffalo Bill."

"You don't mean it, Toby! Have you got them all locked up?"

"No, sah, but I wish as how I had, for from de boss, who oughter hab better sense, down to dem as hain't got no sense, and neb-

ber had, nebber will, dey is all got foolish about dat pretty gambler gal upon de hill at dat ole graveyard of a fort, sah."

"Dey is all dere, and I wishes dey wasn't for de Good Luck and de saloon do look like a church, sah—jist look at 'em, for I is de only man about, even the Chinaman cook and waiters is gone dere to gamble."

"Why, Massa Bill, de boss am goin' ter git dis nigger kilt and de place robbed some night by all goin' up dere."

Buffalo Bill laughed at the negro's tale of woe, and said:

"Well, Toby, I suppose you are lonesome; but put my horse up, while I wash up a little, and I'll desert, too, for I must be in the swim also, and go to the Gambler Girl's ranch."

"Don't do it, Massa Bill, for yer'll lose yer money, and 'sides that gal is goin' ter be ther ruination ob dis place, for she am too pretty in de face, while her heart am harder dan rocks."

"Come, Toby, don't slander my Girl Pard, for I think she is a great addition to Gold Dust."

"Just wait and see, sah, wait and see, sah, for I prophesies trouble, and I knows, I knows," and Toby went to the rear with the scout's horse, little dreaming how soon his prognostications of evil would be fulfilled.

CHAPTER LVIII.

A FIGHT FOR LIFE.

BUFFALO BILL had taken his saddle-pockets to his room, in the Good Luck Hotel, to make his toilet after his long ride, for he did not care to go up to the Girl Gambler's ranch without looking his best.

It did not take him very long to don a clean shirt, wash and brush up, but he was gone long enough, it seemed, for Toby to get back to his post of duty, for, as he was going toward the office, he heard voices, and one was full of agonizing appeal for life.

It was Toby's voice, and then came in a stern tone:

"Why don't yer knife ther black varmint, afore he gits us found out?"

"I'll do it, for we hain't no time ter lose, ef we wants Jerry's gold," was the answer.

But, as the knife was raised to strike the fatal blow—one hand of the ruffian choking into silence Toby's appeal for mercy—there came a flash and sharp report, and the knife fell to the ground, while a yell of terror and pain broke from the lips of the would-be murderer.

With a bound Buffalo Bill leaped out of the door, as his revolver was thrust into the face of the other man ere he could resist, or draw his weapon, and quick and sharp came the words:

"Hands up, or die!"

The command was obeyed with an execration, and the scout called out quickly:

"Catch your man there, Toby, for his arm is broken!"

But the fugitive wheeled, and, drawing a revolver with his left hand, would have ended Toby's days there and then, only for a hastily aimed shot from Buffalo Bill.

It brought the ruffian down, but in doing so the scout had had to uncover the man he held under the muzzle of his revolver. In an instant the fellow took advantage of it, dropped his hands and pulled weapon.

Just in time the scout turned to catch the hand that held the gun, while his own was grasped in the death-grip of his foe.

Thus the two stood, and Buffalo Bill then knew his man for he said sternly:

"Now, Bitter Creek Bob, it's your life or mine!"

"It's his'n, Massa Bill," and with Toby's words came a flash and report.

"My God! ther nigger has done fer me," groaned Bitter Creek Bob, as he sunk in his tracks, his weapon falling from his grasp.

"Yas, sah, I has done yer up, called in yer chips, jist as yer tried ter do for me. We has got 'em, Massa Bill, or ruther you has, for I'd 'a' bin a dead coon but for you, sah, and thanks, too."

"Bitter Creek is dead, Toby, but, as he came to kill you and rob Landlord Jerry it was a righteous shot."

"Who is his pard?"

"He hain't nobody now, sah, for he's dead; but ne were Monk Knight, one ob de most honerarist cusses in de camps, sah."

"Toby, are you afraid of ghosts?"

"Well, sah, I can't jist say I isn't."

"Well, we'll put these bodies inside the house, and then I'll go up to the fort and tell Landlord Jerry."

"And leave me alone, sah?"

"You'll have company enough, and a man who was as brave as you were just now, and killed the great Bitter Creek Bob, ought not be afraid of the devil."

"I'll chance it, sah; but didn't I tell you, sah, som'ting was gwine ter happen?"

"You did, indeed, Toby, and you are a prophet from Wayback. Stay here on guard; I will not be gone long."

And Buffalo Bill followed the fashion and went up to the home of the Queen of Fortune, who had fairly emptied the camps.

"A woman in camp is a phenomenon in this country, especially such a woman," mused the scout, as he went along.

"Good-Luck at night is as noisy a place as there is on earth, generally, a miniature Tower of Babel; but now it is as silent as an Indian burying-ground."

"Why, there is not even a man about except old Toby—even the Chinaman having gone, and all to see a woman."

"Well, my Girl Gambler Pard is more of a mystery to me now than when I believed her to be a boy."

"But, why should she be here, why a gambler, and where did she get her nerve and learn to shoot to kill?"

"Is she a girl, really, or a woman in years and experience?"

"Well, that I must give up, for no man can tell."

A few moments more and Buffalo Bill reached the fort. A light burned over the doorway, and all was brightness within; so the scout paused, and standing out in the shadow viewed the scene.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE UNKNOWN DEAD SHOT.

STANDING in the shadow beyond the ray of light from the large entrance to the fort, Buffalo Bill gazed within with a great deal of curiosity and interest.

There were several hundred men within that large gambling headquarters, and yet a hush seemed to rest upon all.

How different from the saloon in the camps! No drinking, carousing, profanity, or boisterous conversation!

No clouds of smoke, no rude laughter, but all subdued and quiet.

It was an hour before midnight, and all was in full blast, as far as gambling was concerned, but men were taking their winnings and losing calmly.

Every man there was fully armed; it was like a slumbering volcano; yet one presence held the fires in check.

There stood the young girl before the wheel of fortune, spinning it with her jeweled hand.

Her face was beautiful, her attire perfect, and she had a smile of innocence that an infant might have borne.

Landlord Jerry was at the faro table dealing, and he seemed to enjoy it, while Doc Denning was throwing dice with several others, the highest throw to take the pool, and the stage driver was in luck.

Dick Drew was there, standing by the wheel of fortune, betting against the fair gambler and steadily losing.

Wild Walter was by his side and following his example even to the losing.

Other men were there whom the scout recognized, good, bad and indifferent.

All were gambling, all had that hush upon them which the presence of the beautiful gambler seemed to command without an effort.

"Well, it's like Daniel in the lion's den; she has tamed the animals completely."

"What a picture! It is one I never expected to see, even though one does see queer happenings out on this border."

"I'll take a hand, myself, at the Wheel of Fortune, and try my luck against the Gambler Queen."

"They have well named her the Queen of Fortune. Why even old Jerry has got it bad, and Doc Denning is clean gone."

The scout stepped forward into the glare of the light over his head and again halted.

Something he knew not what, caused him to look to the left.

There, in the shadow, at the corner of the stockade structure, the ray of the light gleamed upon a rifle barrel.

The rifle was leveled at him, an eye was running along the sight, and, in that instant, the scout felt that his doom was sealed.

But, ere he could spring into the shadow, or draw a weapon, a red flash came from the other end of the structure, and Buffalo Bill heard the bullet whiz by him, heard the thud as it struck, saw the man who had him covered, sink forward upon his face, the twitching of his finger firing the rifle, for its crack followed the first report almost instantly.

The scout stood there, revolver in hand, while out of the large hall poured a stream of humanity.

Landlord Jerry was among the first, Doc Denning close behind him, and Dick Drew and Wild Walter following.

"Why, Bill, it is you is it? Who shot?"

"I do not know."

"Who is killed?"

"That man lying yonder, Jerry, for he fell at the fire."

"Then you shot him scout!" cried Dick Drew, vengefully.

"I am not in the habit of allowing my word to be doubted, or submitting proof to verify a statement, but in this case I will do so."

"Here, Jerry, see if any shot is missing from my revolver!"

"Not one; but, who is he?"

"I do not know. Perhaps some of his pards may recognize him."

A rush was made for the body, and with the rifle, it was dragged into the light.

Then a chorus of voices arose:

"It's Lem Sykes!"

"What had you against him, scout?"

It was Dick Drew who asked the question.

Buffalo Bill replied quietly:

"What had he rather against me? He was trying to assassinate me when he was killed."

"Yes, Dick Drew, what had he ag'in' Buffalo Bill? He was doing the sneak-murderin' act, an' he's one o' yer Ten o' Diamonds," called out Doc Denning.

"He is one of our club, and that is why I wish to investigate his mysterious death."

"Oh, investigate all you wish. The only mystery about it is that he was shot by some one unseen and unknown before he could kill me."

"How was it, Bill?"

"It is quickly told, Jerry. I arrived an hour ago and found Toby alone in charge, for all in the camps seemed to have come up here, and so I came, too, and standing here in the light, I caught sight of the man with his rifle leveled at me."

CHAPTER LX.

LANDLORD JERRY'S ARGUMENT.

DICK DREW had stepped closer.

It was evident that he wished to hear the scout's story and do some questioning.

So he broke in with:

"Where did you come from to this point?"

"What has that got to do with your pard trying to kill me by a coward shot?"

"Never mind, but answer."

"It is none of your business."

A laugh followed this, but, not in the least disturbed, Dick Drew continued:

"So you refuse to give any information, do you, to clear yourself of suspicion?"

Buffalo Bill smiled and replied:

"I was telling my story when you rudely broke in upon it; but, if you consider that I am answerable to you for your friend's death, I shall have to make myself so I suppose, to protect myself from another coward shot."

Dick Drew dropped his hand upon his revolver, but half a dozen men moved before him, and Buffalo Bill continued:

"I may as well tell you, now, that there was trouble before I came up here, for two men attempted to kill Toby and rob your office, Landlord Jerry, not knowing help was near."

"To save Toby I had to break the knife hand of one of the men, but it did not teach him a lesson, so I was forced to kill him."

"Pards, this scout is going to run camps, must we allow him to do so?" cried out Drew, menacingly.

A number of voices shouted:

"No!"

But, wholly unmoved, Buffalo Bill responded:

"If I did undertake to run these camps as you say, my first duty would be to fall upon those of you who are here dodging law."

These words caused a shrinking back in shadow of half a hundred men, and Dick Drew calmed down.

Continuing, the scout added:

"There were two men, Jerry, in the attack on Toby, and the second one I guessed with, but Toby killed him."

"Ther nigger killed a white man?" yelled a desperado, savagely.

"I will be responsible for that negro's act, for he saved my life by coolly announcing Buffalo Bill, and then resumed in the same calm tones:

"It was Bitter Creek Bob whom Toby killed, and his companion was known as Monk Knight, so you know who they were."

A murmur ran through the crowd at the discovery, and a man called out:

"Does yer say Bitter Creek Bob are a robber?"

"No, for he is dead; but I heard him tell Monk Knight to knife the negro, and they would get away with Landlord Jerry's gold."

"I have told you the facts, so make what you can out of them."

"As to the affair here, a glance to the left showed me this man's leveled rifle, and in the twinkling of an eye I felt my death hour had come; but, then came a flash from that end of the fort yonder, and this man sunk over on his face, his rifle being discharged as he did so."

"Who my unknown rescuer is, I would like to find out."

"You have the story, gentlemen, so I have no more to report."

"See here, pards! Is this man Buffalo Bill to run Gold Dust City?" again demanded Dick Drew.

There came a roar of "No's!"

Then Landlord Jerry called out:

"Silence all!"

He was obeyed.

"Dick Drew, I am surprised at your making a fool of yourself, for it isn't like you, and I tell you you are kicking against a Government officer in the discharge of his duty, and will bring no end of trouble upon Gold Dust City—yes, you will have this fort garrisoned again, not against Indians, but the bad men of these camps."

"Buffalo Bill arrived here to-night, and was in time to save Toby's life and my gold. He came up here, and Lem Sykes, like a sneaking Apache, was firing from ambush at him, when an unseen rescuer killed him."

"So it goes that Monk Knight, Bitter Creek Bob and Lem Sykes are wiped out, and from what their death has proven them to be, good men will be glad of their taking-off."

"Now, drop this quarrel against Buffalo Bill right here and now, or I will muster the good men in the camps to his protection, until the troops get here, and they will know who to select for a hemp picnic."

"Who is with me, who against me, for I wish to know right now?"

Jerry had a very convincing way of putting a case, and seemed to have cowed the bad element, and brought the good men to his way of thinking, for not a voice was raised against his argument, and many began to slip quietly back into the gambling hall to resume their play.

CHAPTER LXI.

A THREAT KEPT.

LANDLORD JERRY felt pleased that his argument had struck home, and was glad to see that he had the good men on his side, and had cowed the bad element.

Excusing himself to Buffalo Bill, he told Doc Denning to take him in and show him the gambling hall, adding:

"I've got to go to the hotel and congratulate Toby."

ing to run
to do so?"

ed:
he'll see you later, Bill, for the Queen of
Pune closes shop sharp at midnight.

Buffalo Bill, "I'll get the gang, and you will not
know they are the same animals when they
turned loose in my den.

But go in and see the prettiest girl in the
wild West."

Buffalo Bill and Doc Denning entered to-
gether.

Dick Drew and his comrades had with-
drawn, with one or two exceptions to carry
their dead pard.

A few curious men had gone off to trail
the unknown dead shot, others had accom-
panied Landlord Jerry to the Good Luck,
and so the fort hall had been reduced by
half.

These had resumed play, and Doc Den-
ning led Buffalo Bill first about the hall,
and then among the tables.

"Dare you risk your luck against mine,
sir?" asked Wild Walter, who had been one
of the Diamond Ten to remain.

"Oh, yes; best three in five for fifty,"
quietly responded Buffalo Bill, putting the
money on the table and picking up the box.

It did not take long to make the throws,
as Buffalo Bill threw sixes straight three
times in succession!

"Try again, sir?"

"No, thank you. I beat you," and Buf-
falo Bill passed on.

Approaching the Wheel of Fortune he
saw the Girl Gambler there, smiling and se-
rene.

She greeted him with a warm grasp of the
hand, remarking pleasantly:

"You knew Dare Kingdon, Mr. Cody, so
permit me to present now the Queen of For-
tune."

The scout dropped his sombrero, made
some passing remark, and, standing amid the
group of players, put his money on the same
number the Queen of Fortune had.

She had been losing for half a dozen
turns of the wheel, but now won.

"You brought me luck, Mr. Cody," she
said.

He again placed his money on the same
number she had chosen.

Again he won.

"There is luck in odd numbers so I'll try
again," he observed.

It was with the same result. He then
pocketed his winnings and was turning
away when Dick Drew came up and said
with a sneer:

"Do you dare play a game of cards for
big money with me?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I do not get my money as you do yours,
for I have only the pay of a chief of scouts in
the army, so have little to risk at cards."

"Does that mean that I do not get mine
honestly?"

"You are the best judge of whether you
do or not, for I did not say that, as I suppos-
ed you were a miner."

"And so I am; but I thought you insulted
me."

"My dear sir, you would not be a moment
in doubt, if I really wished trouble with
you."

"Then you do not?"

"No."

"Be more particular in your way of ad-
dressing me, then," and all saw that Dick
Drew was seeking trouble.

Looking calmly at him, Buffalo Bill re-
sponded:

"My friend, you are far from your real
home, and I advise you, if you ever wish to
return to England with a fortune, not to force
yourself upon an honest American citizen."

"What? Do you say I am not an Ameri-
can?"

"If you are, you look and speak like an
Englishman."

"You are mistaken," and Dick Drew
lowered his hand toward his revolver butt,
though not without Buffalo Bill seeing the
act. Every spectator began to look for
trouble, when, suddenly, a rich, clear voice
called out:

"Dick Drew, leave this hall! Quick! I
have you covered!"

The startled man turned suddenly toward
the speaker.

It was the Queen of Fortune!

And she had him covered, while there was
a dangerous gleam in her beautiful eyes.

"See here, Queen of Fortune, this man in-
sulted me, and—"

"Go!"

The man still hesitated.

"I shall tell you once more, count three
and fire."

"Now—go!"

"One!"

"I obey you, Queen of Fortune; but—"

"Two!"

The man quickened his pace, but hesitated
at the door and turning looked back.

"Three!"

The revolver flashed and the bullet tore
through the hat of the man, who, with a yell
of terror, sprung out into the darkness.

The Queen of Fortune had kept her word.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE NOTE AND THE TELEGRAM.

DICK DREW was a man of nerve, but that
shot of the Queen of Fortune frightened him,
catching him off his guard, for he did not
expect it at the very door.

It cut through the crown of his hat dan-
gerously close to his head.

"She smiled when she pulled trigger,
chief. She didn't mean to kill you but to
scare you," said one of his men who follow-
ed him out.

"She did scare me, too. She'd have killed
me if I had not obeyed her; but I'm not one
to forgive or forget, as she will find out,"
declared Drew.

"You were hot on the trail of Buffalo
Bill."

"I tried to make him draw, for I felt that
I could down him, and Wild Walter had
him covered."

"Yes, and Doc Denning had Wild Wal-
ter covered."

"Did he?"

"He did for a fact!"

"Doc Denning is getting too cheeky. We
will fix him the first time he goes through
with rich freight."

"Yes, but Lem Sykes made a mess of it,
didn't he?"

"Somebody made a mess of him."

"Have you any idea who it was, chief?"

"No; have you?"

"I have not; but it convinces me that Buf-
falo Bill is protected."

"How?"

"There are men shadowing him—to keep
him from being killed, and I'm mighty glad
Landlord Jerry chipped in to-night, for he
saved about half of the Diamond Ten by
doing so."

"You think so?"

"I do; and, let me tell you, I can't just see
why you wish to kill Buffalo Bill, at least
until we know his secret."

"About Lone Hand's gold?"

"Yes."

"I keep forgetting that, in my hatred for
the man. Yes, we must not kill but capture
him."

"So far we have not been very successful
in doing so."

"Some one always chips in for him. Why,
just think how many times he has been
saved! I begin to feel that he has a secret
ally, an invisible protector, as you say."

"Just see how that Girl Gambler saved
him in the valley, and to-night she saved
him again."

"Yes, and saved us, too, for there would
have been but a fivespot where the Diamond
Ten are, if we had made a break."

"Get the scout in our power, force from
him his secret and then we can get gold and
revenge galore, is my advice."

"You have a wise head, Stokes, and I'll
take your advice."

"Now we'll go to Jerry's and see if I do
not behave there, for the gang will soon be
down from the fort, as it is twelve o'clock,"
and the two passed on to try their luck in
Jerry's Joy.

In the mean time, the Queen of Fortune
had asked Doc Denning to turn the wheel
while she left the hall for a few minutes.

When she returned, she struck a little bell
upon the table before her twelve times.

All knew what that meant; it was her
command for all to leave the hall.

It was midnight.

As the scout turned away, she held out her
hand, and he found, as he grasped hers, a
slip of paper in it, and he carefully kept it
concealed.

Doc Denning and others also had the honor
of a hand grasp from her, but she left no slip
of paper in their palms.

As Buffalo Bill and Doc walked away from
the fort, they saw the lights put out, and then
all was darkness.

"What does yer think of her, Pard Bill?"

"I do not know what to think."

"She scared Dick Drew."

"Yes."

"It come mighty near war atween you
two."

"It is war, Doc!"

"See here, I saw you had him covered
quietly to-night, and let me tell you right
now, that I want that man to live; he must
not die—yet."

"And more: you leave with your coach at
dawn?"

"I does."

"I will give you a letter. There will be a
telegram in it and money, addressed to the
operator of the first station where a dispatch
can be sent from. Will you see that it goes
through in all haste?"

"You bet I will, Bill!"

They had reached the Good Luck now, and
found quite a crowd there.

The bodies of Bitter Creek Bob and Monk
Knight were laid out in the office, and Toby
had been relieved from duty, greatly to his
joy.

Going into Landlord Jerry's private office,
Buffalo Bill sat down and wrote as follows:

"To OPERATOR W. U. TEL. CO.,

First Station Overland Trail.

"DEAR SIR:—

"Find within five dollars, and send fol-
lowing dispatch to follow parties if they
have left address given. W. F. CODY.

"To MESSRS. HORACE STINSON & LOYD
MAXWELL,

53 West Jackson St., Chicago, Ill.

"Come to Gold Dust City with all haste.
Have found your man. BUFFALO BILL."

This letter to the operator, with inclo-
sures, was given to Doc Denning to rush
through with all dispatch, from one stage-
driver's hand to another, and Buffalo Bill
knew well that it would be done.

Then the scout had a talk with Landlord
Jerry and went to his room, for he had read
the slip of paper pressed into his hand by
the Queen of Fortune, and it was as fol-
lows:

"Do not, under any circumstances, have
trouble with that Englishman; he must live
to tell what he knows!"

CHAPTER LXIII.

TRACKED.

SEVERAL days passed away at Gold Dust
City, and for some reason there had been no
more trouble since the night when it nearly
came to shots between Buffalo Bill and Dick
Drew at the Girl Gambler's hall.

The scout, for some reason, kept close to
the hotel, went to the old fort when the
Queen had her doors open, and strolled in
and out of Jerry's Joy.

But he did not play, and seemed anxious
to keep very quiet, to the distress of a num-
ber in Gold Dust City who thought his re-
maining there was an ill-omen, a sign of bad
luck to some one.

The Queen of Fortune had been seen riding
about the Camps, now in her attractive rid-
ing habit, and again in her male attire as Dare
Kingdon; but whatever she was pleased to do
no one doubted her motives.

The miners held a meeting, as was now
and then their wont, and denounced lawless-
ness, and congratulated themselves that the
graveyard of Gold Dust City had been boom-
ing of late with the number of really bad men
placed there.

Bitter Creek Bob, Monk Knight and Lem
Sykes had been given burial with regrets
that they had been found to be so very bad,
and were given credit for having performed a
good deed when they died, thus ridding the
camps of their company.

In the meeting Buffalo Bill had been prais-
ed most highly and given a vote of thanks.
The Queen of Fortune also had been spoken
of for having opened such an orderly and
honest gambling den, and she was voted "the
first citizen" of the community—Landlord
Jerry coming in as second best.

Dick Drew had kept unusually quiet since

the coming of Buffalo Bill, and the Diamond Ten as a whole appeared to be subdued.

But, they were seen about the Good Luck a great deal for some purpose.

After four days' absence Doc Denning had returned to Gold Dust, and informed Buffalo Bill that the dispatch had gone through all right.

It was a four days' stay in Gold Dust; then the driver again started out for his long run.

His hour of departure was just before dawn, and he apparently went out with an empty coach; still, had anyone been watching, he would have seen Doc Denning pick up a man on the trail beyond the camps.

That passenger was Buffalo Bill, and yet that day in Gold Dust City, Landlord Jerry gave out that Buffalo Bill was real sick and confined to his room!

When Doc's coach got to the end of its run, a hundred miles from Gold Dust, Buffalo Bill found that a message was there awaiting him.

It was as follows:

"Will come with all haste.

"Write by Denning where to met you.

"STINSON AND MAXWELL."

Making inquiry Buffalo Bill learned that the message had been there five days, and the next coach should bring the two detectives, if it had met no delays.

That was the coach for which Doc Denning waited.

It came in that night at sunset, and Buffalo Bill saw, to his joy, the two Englishmen spring out.

"You wired that you had found our man?" said Stinson when the three were alone in the coach on the trail to Gold Dust.

"I have."

"But, Buck Bradley is dead."

"He may be, but there is nothing in a name."

"Did you make any discoveries East?"

"Nothing. We were utterly blue when we got your message, for there was no clue we could pick up by which to trace the children."

"If I am not mistaken I can find one of them for you."

"One of the children?"

"Yes."

"Tell us what you know."

"You told me that your man had one gold tooth."

"Yes."

"You also said that he had a lock of gray hair in the top of his head."

"Yes."

"He was six feet, well formed, and powerfully built, with the first joint of his little finger on his left hand missing."

"That is the description."

"You were careful to give me the man's full description and pedigree, and I recall that you told me his mother's maiden name was Jones."

"No, Drew."

"Ah, yes; and his father was known as Dick Castle."

"True."

"Well, I have a man who answers your description perfectly, save that he wears long hair and a full beard, and he is an Englishman, while he has blended the maternal and paternal names together and calls himself Dick Drew."

"It is our man!"

"I guess so, especially as the writing on the paper I took from the man who attempted to kill me, you know, is the *fac simile* of that which you gave me as a specimen of his. And more: Buck Bradley was the pard who came with him to the mines; they could have easily changed names."

"You have found our man," cried both detectives eagerly and delightedly. "You are the detective of detectives, Cody!"

CHAPTER LXIV.

ON THE RIGHT TRAIL.

DOC DENNING drove into Gold Dust City with an empty coach; but then, the miners did not see him set down three passengers before he reached the first camp.

And no one at the Good Luck saw those three passengers slip into their rooms, for Landlord Jerry, Doc Denning and Toby arranged that, all right, while it being the night for the Queen of Fortune to reign, most of the miners were up at the fort.

Then there was a meeting in Landlord Jerry's own private rooms, which were apart from the noise and confusion of the place.

It was a "council of war," as Doc Denning called it, and Toby was placed on guard to see that there were no intruders.

The three passengers were there—Buffalo Bill, Horace Stinson and Loyd Maxwell.

There were present, also, Landlord Jerry and Doc Denning.

Buffalo Bill was the spokesman. He made known to the landlord and driver just why the two detectives had come to America, and then to the mines of that region.

He further told them that the man they sought was in Gold Dust City beyond all doubt, and that he could put his hands upon him.

Furthermore he said that the two heirs, spoken of by the English officers as children, had really grown up since their having been kidnapped.

The nurse, Lucy Fisher, was dead, slain by the real kidnapper, Kit Castle, *alias* Liverpool and other assumed names.

This kidnapper had given the stolen heirs into the keeping of a man to whom he had sold his secret, that they could one day get a large fortune.

This man had claimed the children as his own, had married, and his wife was glad to adopt them.

But the man was at heart a villain, had committed crimes for which others had suffered, had deceived his wife, and, at last, became a fugitive.

The children had remained with the mother, who, believing her husband dead—he who had so deceived her and wrecked her life—had married her first lover, the victim of another's wrong.

They had gone to Texas to live, but there adversity had dogged their steps, and the man had gone to the mines of the Wild West to seek his fortune.

After years he had struck it rich, and when, at last he had started back to his loved ones, he had already been picked out to kill.

His old enemy had not been killed by him, as he had supposed; the villain still lived, and was also in the mines.

It was this man who was plotting to kill and get his victim's gold.

And his plot to kill had been successful, but the gold was secure, for the prudent miner had taken means not to be robbed of his hard-earned fortune.

He had hidden his gold, and with his leather bag filled with rocks painted yellow, had given the robbers a chance to rob him of—nothing.

The gold was secure. But where was it?

He had written to his wife where it was, should harm befall him, and this letter had been registered, so was safe.

And that loving wife had sent a true friend, the twin brother of her wicked first husband, out to find the one she loved.

He had come to the mines of Gold Dust Valley, and also himself had "struck it rich."

But, he had also met with dangers, and nearly lost his life.

Just then he was absent on a trip to Texas, but was on his way back to Gold Dust Valley.

From a telegraph station he had wired him, Buffalo Bill, to a point from whence it had reached him.

Then the scout read the dispatch aloud.

It was as follows:

"The wife died suddenly of heart disease six months ago.

"All of her husband's letters had been intercepted, in some way, but the children live and are somewhere in the Northwest looking for their adopted father, and the man whom they learned, by their mother's death, kidnapped them from their home in England.

"The registered letter is in hands of postmaster, but will be returned immediately to postmaster at Gold Dust, through whom it came.

"I am hastening back to you with all speed, for have more to tell than can wire.

"ALF ELLIS."

"Alf Ellis?" cried Landlord Jerry and Doc Denning, in a breath.

"Yes, Alphonse Ellis, the brother of Alf Ellis whom you knew, and whose fate I will

now make known, as also that of Buck Bradley, one of his men, one of the Ten of Diamonds."

Buffalo Bill then told the story of the attack on Lone Hand Sam, adding:

"And Lone Hand Sam was Doctor Aubrey Burr, the adopted father of those children, whom his wife, as Mrs. Alf Ellis, had adopted.

"Now, gentlemen, you have the full parts of this double, yes, triple trail—seen the wheels within wheels of villainy that have been working against those children and Doctor Aubrey Burr, as also against Alphonse Ellis.

"You know the whole story now."

"Well, Buffalo Bill, you've played a sure lone hand in this whole game and won it; but there is one thing yet to be done," said Landlord Jerry, earnestly.

"What is that, Jerry?"

"Find those children."

"I believe I can place one of them, Jerry, according to signs," was the smiling reply of the scout.

CHAPTER LXV.

THE GAME ENDS

"You don't mean to say that you think one of the lost heirs is in Gold Dust City, Bill?" asked Doc Denning, with a strange twinkle in his eye.

"I will tell you what I know, Doc."

"First, from these gentlemen I understand that the lost heirs are now twenty years of age. They are a girl and a boy. The Christian names of the children I will let you know, later."

"The girl has a distinguishing mark upon her left wrist—a bracelet tattooed with indiana ink in yellow, to represent gold, and red to represent rubies."

"As though not liking to wear such a distinguishing brand now, a solid gold band covers it, fitting close to the wrist; for I have seen it, and when it fell off, becoming unclasped, picked it up and returned it to its owner."

"When I tell you that the girl's name is Queen, I think you can recognize her."

"The Queen of Fortune!" cried Landlord Jerry, in surprise, while Doc said earnestly:

"Yes, Pard Bill, yer is on ther right trail, for that's ther gal, and I'm goin' ter tell yer a secret, bein' as how ther way you trails a case yer'd soon be enter it."

"It's just this, that I knows whar ther boy is, too, and I wants yer ter listen to me."

All were now waiting with rapt attention, and Doc Denning continued:

"You all knows when ther youth, Dare Kingdon, come here, and what happened?"

"Well, he come fer a purpose, and he took me inter ther game ter help him out."

"He said he were trackin' three men, two of whom he had not seen for years—one when he were a kid of seven, t'other when he were about twelve, and the third some two years ago."

"The last one he loved as a father and wanted to find, as he feared he had been killed."

"Another he wanted to find and kill."

"The third had a secret he intended to force from him."

"He had been on the trail some six months, he said, and was convinced that Gold Dust Valley was the place to look for all three, so he had come here and looked around, coming on horseback, and in disguise afore he did in my coach, and he was delighted he had, he told me, as he had chanced upon you, Bill, about ter be strung up, and he at once kilt one man with his rifle, imitated a bugle and set the others going; but he had kept clear of your seeing him, for he didn't want to be seen, jist then."

"Then he was my Invisible Rescuer?"

"So it seems; and you helped him out the day he got into trouble, in my coach."

"But, he told me, he was nct playing a lone hand, for his sister was to be in the game with him."

"They both had been experts in games, and where they lived in Texas, they larned how ter shoot ter kill, ter throw a rope, and ter ride anything; so he planned ter git ther old fort and open a gambling den, for he

were sure that would come every man in this border country, in time.

"And he were about right.

"But, he got me ter help him smuggle his sister inter Gold Dust, and we did it away up, for she got inter ther old fort unseen.

"And, that wasn't all, for he arranged it so the two of 'em should play as one—see?

"Well, it were him yer seen on horseback, and her yer seen a-runnin' ther games.

"It were him, Bill, as nipped ther feller as tried ter kill you the night you hed ther row with Bitter Creek Bob in Jerry's Joy.

"It were him as saved yer when you left with yer two English pards here ter go back to ther fort, and he seen yer coming to his ranch t'other night, seen Lem Sykes layin' ter kill yer, and got ther lead inter him first from around ther corner of ther stockade—see?"

"Yes, I do see now who my ally and rescuer has been—realize all that I owe to him; but, who was it, Doc, him or her, that saved me in the valley, the other day?"

"That was him!

"Yer see he told me he hed been raised on the Texas prairies and in the mountains, brought up to kill redskins and Mexican raiders, was captain of a company of Texan Rangers, so nothin' we could show him come strange to him, and his sister is about like him, and she should be in natur', seein' as they is twins, and as like as two bullets, ther same size and all, and she kin rig up as a boy as well as a gal.

"Now yer has it all, and as yer said Doctor Aubrey Burr was ther adopted Pa. I at once know'd they war ther lost heirs these gents wanted ter find. So everybody is found, as they has recognized ther old kidnapper as Dick Drew, so what you can't tell 'em, Bill, they kin tell you.

"Now, what's to be done?"

In the enthusiasm that followed, they shook hands all round in congratulation, and Landlord Jerry got out a bottle of his private stock and a box of cigars to treat; but he kept his promise to Buffalo Bill and did not take a drink himself.

"Now the work on hand is to arrest Dick Drew."

"That's going to be tough work, for there will be killing done."

"I will try and arrange it otherwise, Doc, and my plan is for you to go and see young Kingdon and his sister—"

"You go with me to-night, after the games are over."

"Very well; I will be there, so you go and tell them of my coming, and have them detain Dick on some excuse, you remaining with him."

"Then we'll bag him, and Landlord Jerry can send word for the balance of the Ten of Diamonds to come later into his quarters, one or two at a time, and I will be here with Mr. Stinson and Mr. Maxwell, and I think there will be no trouble."

"That is it, Bill. All is in your hands," said Landlord Jerry.

CHAPTER LXVI.

CONCLUSION.

THE meeting of Buffalo Bill with Kingdon and Queen Burr, the capture of Dick Drew, and the corraling afterward of the remainder of the Ten of Diamonds was accomplished; but, not the capture of all the band alive, for Wild Walter and two others resisted to the bitter end, and were shot in the melee.

When the capture was known the presence of Queen Burr alone prevented what would have been a deadly combat, for the rough element was aroused to resistance, as they saw their strength waning in the camp.

But the presence and the firm stand of Buffalo Bill and his backers compelled order and quelled the storm.

The next day Buffalo Bill, the English officers, with their prisoner, Dick Drew, and a strong guard with the outlaws whom the scout had arrested, accompanied by Kingdon and Queen Burr, started for the fort, and were royally welcomed there, as may be surmised.

There they remained until the arrival of Alphonse Ellis, and his story supplied every link in the chain of evidence needed.

The registered letter was opened by Kingdon Burr, and there was the map, with full

instructions as to where and how to find the dead miner's fortune of gold, and Buffalo Bill was the guide that led to where it was secreted.

Dick Drew, on requisition papers, was carried back to England, and was there tried, found guilty and executed, as he so richly merited.

The heirs, after investing the gold, which was their legacy by will, also went to England and there secured their inheritance; but, true Americans at heart, they returned to the United States to live, and both are now happily married and most honored members of society, while the two English detective officers, pleased with their experience in this country, followed the example of the brother and sister, and also settled here.

Doc Denning is still living in the Wild West, a partner of Jerry in a large hotel, while Alphonse Ellis wooed and won gallant Nellie Benham of Fort Advance.

And of Buffalo Bill: honors have come so many that in Europe as well as in America he is the Knight of the Plains—the admired of all who honor the true heroic in human nature.

THE END.

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